

EVANSTON'S BUSINESS RECOVERY PLAN

A FUNDING REQUEST FOR RECOVERY AND GROWTH

Report by:
Evanston Covid-19
Business Task Force

May 2021



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The recommendations in the taskforce final report were designed prior to American Rescue Plan Act. An allocation for business district activities is contemplated in the the Act. We will continue to identify other funding sources and resources to implement these solutions to leverage awarded Rescue Plan Act dollars.

1. MAYOR'S MESSAGE

Evanston is a special place.

Working together with the Evanston community we were able to keep Evanston's Covid-19 numbers the lowest in Metro Chicago. Evanston's sacrifices resulted in relatively low infection rates. While we mourn each untimely death, we applaud the sacrifices that helped limit the impact on our community.

On March 17, 2020, I convened the first Coronavirus Task Force to communicate and coordinate a community approach to handling the pandemic working with our partners District 65, District 202, Northwestern University, federal, state, and county elected offices, faith-based organizations, the non-profit organizations, and the business community.

As an Evanston entrepreneur, I recognize the everyday challenges faced by business owners. The pandemic posed a new set of challenges. I asked Roger Sosa, the Executive Director of the Evanston Chamber of Commerce to chair the Coronavirus Business Task Force to coordinate the difficult task of helping businesses survive and ultimately recover from these challenges.

I appreciate the work that the members of this Task Force provided to business of all sizes and sectors in the past year. I would like to thank, Roger Sosa, Annie Coakley of Downtown Evanston, Katherine Gotsick of Main Dempster Mile, Gina Speckman of Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau, and Paul Zalmezak, the City's Economic Development Manager. I also want to thank Cindy Rawlings of Wintrust Bank and Randy Usen of Byline Bank for their frequent contribution to the Task Force as well as Northwestern University representatives Dave Davis and Tim Feddersen for bringing university resources to the Task Force. And a final thanks goes to all of the business representatives who contributed to the Task Force including Clarence Weaver and David Lipschutz.

The recommendations in this report will serve both as a road map to pandemic recovery and a blueprint for Evanston business districts to thrive moving forward.

Sincerely,

Stephen H. Hagerty
Mayor

2. TASKFORCE MESSAGE

In April of 2020, the Evanston Covid-19 Business Task Force was formed to aid in the survival and recovery of Evanston's blend of independent restaurants, retailers, and services located in nearly a dozen unique business districts throughout the city.

This Task Force met weekly to share resources and conducted outreach to the business community through surveys, one-on-one conversations, focus group discussions and workshops.

Since that time, we have been able to provide the business community of Evanston with valuable resources to assist them through the pandemic from full shut down to re-opening in slow increments to loss of revenue and all things in between. This work included:

- Technical Assistance Webinars
- Loan and Grant Checklists
- Shop/Dine Local Marketing Campaigns
- Fundraisers for LEND & Advocated for Economic Development funding to assist with small loans
- Weekly communication of the government's rules and regulations
- Recovery University Educational Series
- Bulk Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) procurement

In order to fully recover and thrive, essential economic development tools are needed to foster necessary development and create programs to capture renewed interest in our business districts, mainly due to new post-pandemic and consumer trends.

In addition, the Task Force acknowledges the important social justice movement of 2020 sparked by the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the senseless shooting of Jacob Blake. As we recover from the impacts of Covid-19, our recommendations include a lens for social and racial equity. This is a critical component of recovering better together.

This report summarizes the COVID-19 impacts on our business community and provides a roadmap to a quick recovery including recommendations for funding. We need to work together, with strong leadership, to provide vital support to our business community. We look forward to working together to implement these recommendations.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evanston has successfully made the case to the federal government. A \$42 million investment through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) has been granted. Our economic recovery is vital not only to the 75,000 community members who call Evanston home, but also the hundreds of small and mid-sized businesses who employ over 35,000 individuals. Northwestern University, NorthShore University Health System, NorthShore Evanston Hospital, Amita Health St. Francis Hospital, our largest employers also contribute significantly to our economy through job creation, research and development, and indirect economic impact through support of independent small business procurement, and restaurant and retail purchases. These stable businesses have an employee base with strong incomes who live in Evanston's single family and multifamily housing throughout the city.

Language in the ARPA expressly authorizes the funds to be used to in the support of small businesses specifically detailing eligibility for dollars to be used to respond to the negative economic impacts of the pandemic. Like other communities throughout the United States, we support earmarking this once-in-a-lifetime funding to mitigate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our business districts and rebuild demand for retail and restaurant spending, and to help property owners upgrade their physical spaces to accommodate the post-pandemic workforce. This must be done quickly and equitably.

The work of the Mayor's Coronavirus Task Force incorporates the input from business owners across all sectors, university professors, and industry experts. The Covid-19 Business Task Force is recommending a series of improvements to City of Evanston local ordinances to improve the business environment. And perhaps most importantly, we are recommending a significant contribution of the American Rescue Plan Act funding to be allocated to human capital programming, merchant district infrastructure, and capital improvements.

Based on the funding guideline (A) in the American Rescue Plan Act Funds "to respond to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality;" **the Business Task Force recommends leveraging \$10million from the American Rescue Plan Act to support an equitable, immediate, and sustainable economic recovery, focused on the following activities:**

1. Create and Implement an Evanston Branding Campaign
2. Invest in the Public Realm to Create a Competitive Destination
3. Enhance Business Attraction & Retention Efforts
4. Create a Long Lasting Workforce Development Strategy
5. Rebuild Tourism
6. Improve Government Service Delivery
7. Create Meaningful Partnerships

In addition to this recommended investment, the Task Force recommends the City of Evanston review regulations and policies that impact businesses. This includes review of federal, state, and county level regulations. Areas recommended to review include:

1. Cook County Commercial Property Tax
2. City of Evanston Liquor Tax
3. Outdoor Dining and Public Right of Way Regulations
4. Commercial District Zoning
5. Parking

The Task Force also recommends the City of Evanston consider new initiatives to improve the business environment and to help expedite the formation of new business:

1. Create a new Howard Street SSA in partnership with the City of Chicago, perhaps the first "regional" SSA.
2. Creating a Central Evanston Business Association (CEBA) SSA to incorporate Black cultural components
3. Streamlined process for startups/entrepreneurs
4. Grants/low-interest loans
5. Business District Ambassador Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are estimated budgets for each of the recommended activities. Community input will ultimately shape the budget and programming. In the appendix are potential activities and estimated costs based on experience. Actual costs would be determined through requests for proposals and other means.

Create and Implement an Evanston Branding Campaign

Partners: SSAs, CVB, City, Chamber

Cost: \$250,000

Invest in Infrastructure and Public Realm to Create a Competitive Destination

Partners: SSAs, City

Cost: \$2.75 million

Examples included in Appendix A

Enhance Business Attraction & Retention Efforts

Partners: SSAs, City

Cost: \$3 million

Examples included in Appendix B

Create a Long Lasting Workforce Development Strategy

Partners: City, Chamber

Cost: \$500,000

Examples included in Appendix E

Rebuild Tourism

Partners: CVB, SSAs

Cost: \$1 million

Examples included in Appendix C

Improve Government Service Delivery

Partners: City

Cost: \$0 to \$250,000

Examples included in Appendix D

Create Meaningful Partnerships

Partners: Community Wide

Cost: \$0 to \$250,000

Examples included in Appendix D

4. COVID-19 IMPACTS ON THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Evanston's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will be aided by the strong fundamentals of our local economy. Northwestern University's impact cannot be understated, nor can the downtown Evanston office market. Pre-Covid both account for approximately 30,000 daytime population within a mile of Church Street and Sherman Avenue supporting restaurants, shops, and local services. While the stay-at-home order has created extra daytime density for the business districts located in residential areas (Main-Dempster Mile, Central Street), many of those businesses also had to make significant investments in e-commerce, and in the time and staffing required to become fulfillment operations.

Fortunately, earlier generations of Evanston leadership recognized the importance of having a diversity of land uses and supported policies laying the groundwork current leadership to support development of mid-rise and high-rise residential that provided an additional market of evening and weekend shoppers and diners.

Evanston's location as a Lake Michigan shoreline community and the first suburb north of Chicago make it desirable as a business center and premium residential community. In addition to Northwestern University anchoring the community, Evanston's connections to Downtown Chicago and the North Shore via Metra and Chicago Transit Authority rail lines further support Evanston prosperity by making it accessible to the most desirable, highly educated labor force in the Midwest.

Unfortunately, the pandemic negatively impacted the foundations of Evanston's economic prosperity and highlighted some of the social, economic and racial inequities that have, for too long, kept Evanston from reaching its full economic potential

Evanston's Black community has experienced higher unemployment, lower wages, and impediments to home ownerships than its white residents. In addition, the growth of e-commerce has hurt our business districts. COVID-19 has only expedited this trend.

The pandemic will force some small businesses to permanently close. It will drive down tax revenues to the city in the short run as property values recover from the immediate impact of vacancies.

Hotels will be slow to recover as travel has been curtailed by Covid-19 mitigations and meetings and conferences will be slow to resume. Northwestern University as well as downtown office tenants will continue to move to normal operations over the course of 2021 on a tiered schedule. But humans are wired to work together, to work in person, to collaborate together in city centers and marketplaces and public places. The purpose in this report is to provide a roadmap for business recovery, to lay the groundwork for a quicker, equitable, and sustainable recovery.

5. TASKFORCE OUTREACH TO EVANSTON BUSINESSES

Early Phases

The primary concern at the beginning of the pandemic focused on safety for employees and customers as well as assisting businesses that were under severe financial pressure due to stay-at-home order and lack of revenue. Based on a number of surveys, Zoom calls, and taskforce meetings, members of the taskforce learned what the immediate needs were. Emphasis was on connecting businesses to relief programs.

- Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)
- Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL)
- Business Interruption Grants (BIG)
- Various county, civic and private programs including LEND.

The Task Force created new interactive webinars to address the above concerns:

- Navigating What the COVID-19 Restoration Phases and latest Covid Relief Bill Means to You
- Covid-19 Travel and Hotel Impact Update
- Consumer Sentiment: Marketing Fall/Winter during Covid-19
- Social Media Marketing – Low Cost Outreach Alternative
- Navigating PPP/EIDL/BIG Covid Relief Grant Programs
- Safe Inside: Communicating to Businesses How to Enact IDPH Guidelines

The Task Force supported and advocated for a number of campaigns including:

- reCOVERevanston
<https://www.recoverevanston.com/>
- Keep Calm Carry Out
- Keep Calm Carry Out Free Parking Zones
- Without Aid
<https://www.withoutaidevanston.org/>
- Outdoor Dining fees waived and street closures
- Various fee holidays and delayed payments
- Bulk PPE purchases
- Northwestern University Entrepreneurship Support
<https://evanstonnu.startuptree.co/>
- Participant in Weekly Mayor's Community Pandemic Task Force Call

Current Phase

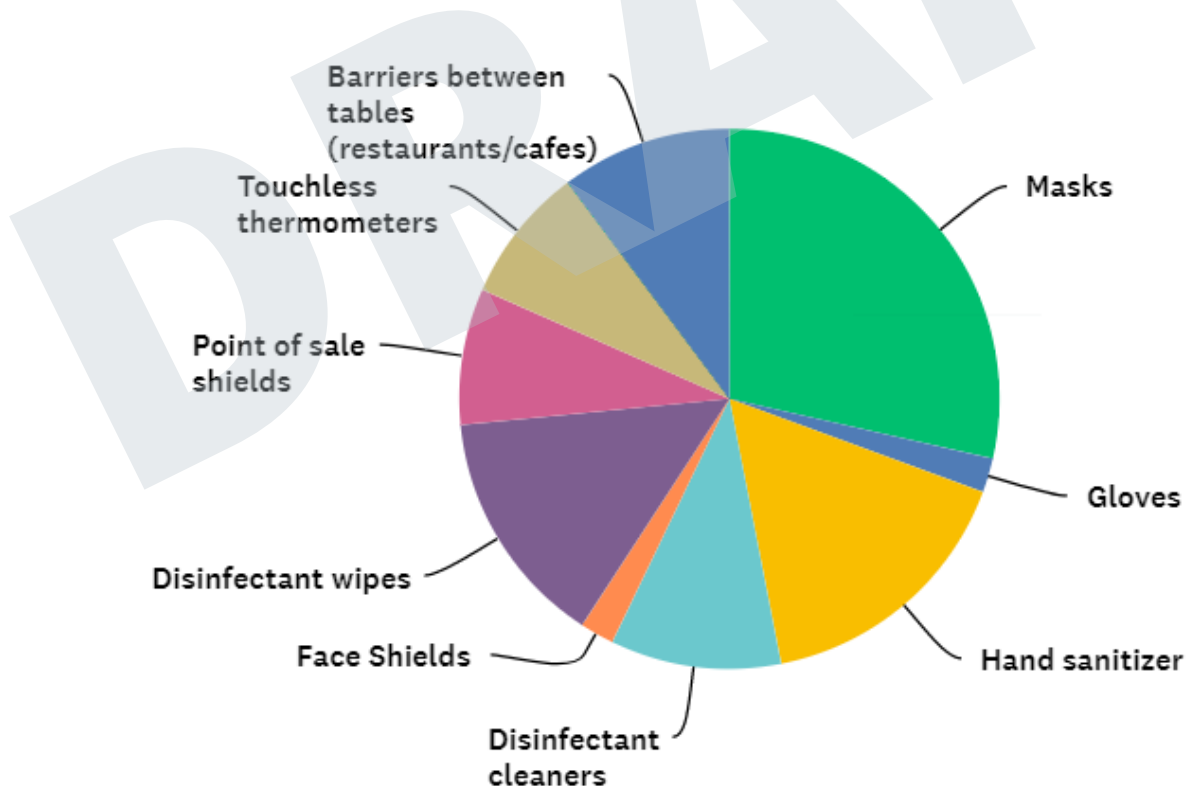
Planning for recovery is difficult in the last stages of the pandemic. So many businesses remain closed or are operating at significantly reduced capacities or have changed their business model entirely. In accordance with IDPH guidelines, restaurants who once focused on providing experiences as a “third place” between work and home have shifted to be able to pivot to changing capacities and mitigations.

Some fortunate enough to have sidewalks wide enough or parking spaces curbside created new outdoor experiences.

Retailers asked for patience while customers lined up outside the doors waiting for shoppers to exit, or setting up a “counter” at the front door to take orders or to hand over items purchased online. Salons/Barber shops opened with every other chair and double masks.

As the end of the pandemic nears, the Task Force focused on seeking input from the business community through focus groups, individual interviews, workshops and surveys. We surveyed businesses and landlords to see how the last year impacted their business and how we can best assist in their recovery.

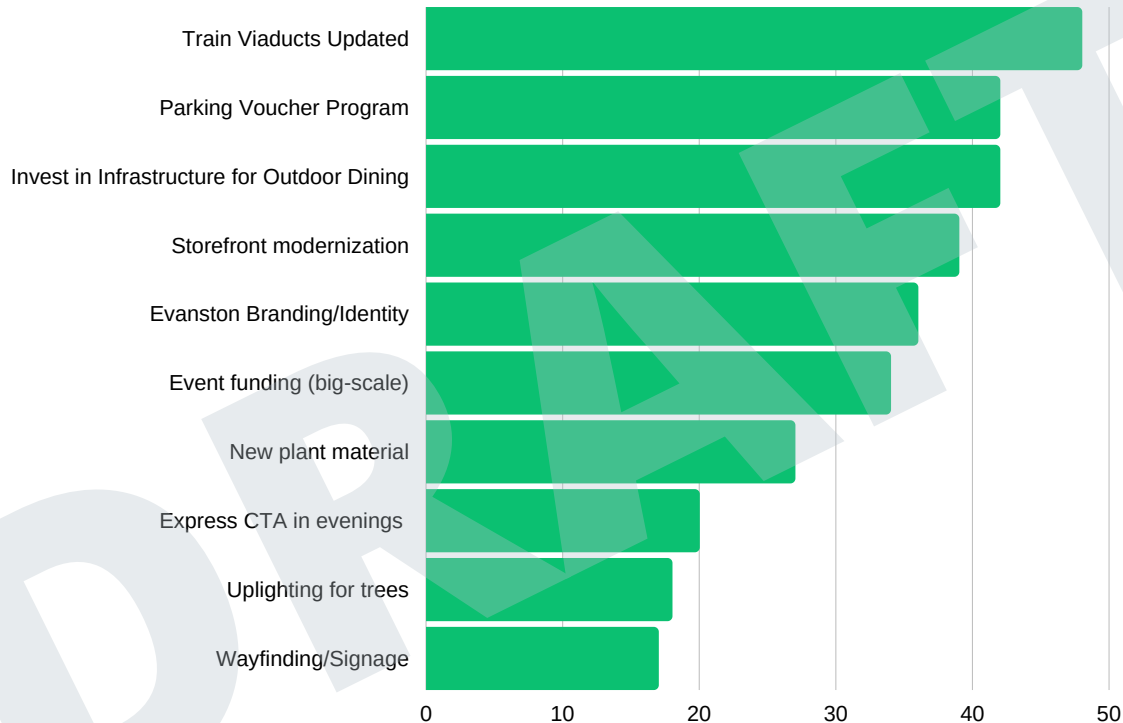
WHAT DO YOU NEED TO REOPEN SAFELY? SURVEY RESULTS FROM MAY 19, 2020



In the meantime, the US Congress passed the American Rescue Plan of 2021 - a nearly \$2 trillion stimulus package including direct aid to businesses, individuals and local governments. The City of Evanston received and allocation of approximately \$42 million, half to be paid in May 2021, the other half coming a year later. A majority of those funds will be committed to assist the community in recovery from COVID-19 economic impacts.

Businesses reported that the top areas of public investment that could have the biggest impact on Evanston's commercial districts include improvements to the public appearance of business districts including train viaducts, reduced parking fees, investment in business storefront appearance, and outdoor dining infrastructure. The complete results are highlighted in the table below.

TOP AREAS OF INVESTMENT THAT COULD HAVE THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON EVANSTON'S COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS
SURVEY RESULTS FROM MARCH 27, 2021 (95 PARTICIPANTS)



Based on the findings from this latest survey, the Task Force recommends a visioning phase focused on developing key indicators to determine what success looks like. These indicators will correspond to crucial economic segments that contribute to Evanston's vitality, including the hotel, retail, restaurant/bar and entertainment industries.

5. TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

To aid in a faster, more equitable, sustainable/long lasting recovery, the Task Force offers the following six recommendations along with a request for funding from the American Rescue Plan allocation. The American Rescue Plan funding should leverage additional funding from private, non-profits, and other public funding sources, wherever available.

Recommendations

1. **Create and Implement an Evanston Branding Campaign**
2. **Invest in the Public Realm to Create a Competitive Destination**
3. **Enhance Business Attraction & Retention Efforts**
4. **Create a Long Lasting Workforce Development Strategy**
5. **Rebuild Tourism**
6. **Improve Government Service Delivery**
7. **Create Meaningful Partnerships**

These recommendations are informed by the experiences of our struggling, yet resilient businesses, and their input throughout the pandemic; the expert advice from Evanston's professionals including Northwestern University, banks, and members of the Task Force; Task Force research of best practices worldwide; and input from Evanston's engaged community.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Create and Implement an Evanston Branding Campaign

In the last 10 years there has been millions of dollars invested in new commercial, retail and residential development, and a progressive government that is focusing on making Evanston a model for sustainable "green" energy technology and innovation, Evanston is an educational and health care center for region and world, and we are poised to be an even greater 21st Century City in this region. However, the city brand currently lacks an active message or exciting environment and is often empty on weekends and in the evenings, downtown specifically.

Funding and staff time should be committed to:

- Creating a new Evanston branding campaign tied to generating community pride, retaining existing businesses, and attracting new businesses
- Advertising the campaign to visitors, potential employers, and community members
- Participating in other existing campaigns in Chicagoland including the tourism recovery campaign titled "The Only Thing Missing is You."
- Design and implement new amenities and activities for daytime employees, Evanston community members (weekend/evening), and visitors (tourists and business travelers)
- Focus on strong education system, Lake Michigan, Northwestern University, progressive high income population.
- Expand the operating hours of Evanston by encouraging activity beyond 9pm including dining, art, performing arts, movies, and music.

To achieve this, a concerted effort to collect and analyze new sources of data / information is required, perhaps with the assistance of an expert consultant leading the community engagement process. A new narrative that incorporates the diverse viewpoints of Evanston community members is critical.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Invest in the Public Realm to Maintain a Competitive Destination

Public Spaces have an important role for recovery. We must proceed with caution as the idea of “gathering” goes against what we have been practicing for over a year. Public parks and recreation areas are already known amenities to Evanston residents. The focus here should be on those spaces not already seen as a “sanctioned” public space like our alleys and streets and parking spaces and garages. American cities have long resisted allowing a mixture of uses in public space, with regulations blocking activities that would be acceptable in many other parts of the world. Now is the time to rethink those regulations—and fast.

Improvements that would make a cost effective immediate impact include:

- City-wide Mural/Public Art Program: \$200,000
- New Graphics and Wayfinding
- Uplighting for Trees, Sculptures, and Buildings
- Streetscape infrastructure improvements including benches, recycling cans, bike racks.

Merchant districts feel more vibrant when lit properly. In addition to street lighting and the classic Talmadge street pole, there are opportunities to light the pedestrian level and create vibrancy. Examples include festoon lighting spanning streets, or public plazas. Uplighting at the base of trees would add ambience to otherwise dark streets, especially during the winter months. Tree lights in targeted areas such as experienced on Howard Street add a sense of vibrancy.

Evanston business districts have a variety of public streetscape amenities including benches, bike racks, trash and recycling cans, and newspaper stands. Funding should be provided to:

- Properly maintain street furniture.
- Acquire a standard classic bench, trash, and recycling containers - similar to the standard Talmadge street light.
- Fund workforce program/summer jobs program to install/replace existing outdated furnishings
- Maintain existing furnishings

Finally, our business districts are filled with creative and engaged business owners. And the special service areas managing the districts are generally well equipped to help implement cutting edge solutions and best practices including:

- Pop Ups
- Retail Incubators
- Events
- Concerts
- Tactical Urbanism (i.e. street closures, art, and other experiences)

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Enhanced Office Business Attraction & Expansion Efforts

Evanston has long served as a corporate headquarters location. In addition to NorthShore University HealthSystem, Rotary International, and of course Northwestern University, the Methodist Pension Board, American Hospital Supply, Washington National Insurance, Shand Morahan, and Shure Microphones all called Evanston home. But with the growth of competitive office locations in the region and technological changes, the demand for traditional headquarters space has declined in Evanston.

In recent years, however, small office-based startups, non-profits, publishing, and financial services have filled the downtown offices. A typical Evanston company occupies 5,000 square feet with 20 to 25 employees. Once a company of this size grows, it is forced to seek space elsewhere - usually Ravenswood corridor or West Loop or River North - because there were limited options for contiguous space in Evanston. Office vacancy rates were as low as 5% in the fourth quarter of 2018. Immediately prior to the pandemic, it stabilized at 7%. Today it is approximately 9%.

In fact, demand has been so great for larger contiguous office space resulting in an approved proposal for a 200,000 square foot office building at 601 Davis Street. Construction has been delayed as the developer seeks financing in a market shaken by the unknown short-term impacts of the pandemic. Real Estate data analyst, Co-Star, predicts office vacancy will peak at 11.6% in the second quarter of 2022. This represents nearly 400,000 square feet city wide.

If this prediction holds, the Evanston office market will emerge from the pandemic in relatively good shape, at least for office owners. Vacancy rates and rent levels (also fairly stable during the pandemic) are only an indication that businesses have maintained their leases and are generally paying rent.

However, the Task Force believes it's too early to predict the impact the pandemic will have on these most important businesses "above street level." Will offices return to a hybrid model? For how long? What percentage of the employees will work remotely? What has been most noticeable and arguably more important to Evanston as whole is the absence of the daytime office worker - approximately 30,000 of them within one mile of Church and Sherman. These office workers buy morning and afternoon coffee, go out to lunch, and hit up happy hour after work. In recent years, Target opened provided a place to run errands, in addition to the Northwestern University student go to place to stock up.

The Task Force recommends **focusing financial and human resources to actively promoting a safe return to work and providing a higher level of public amenities to attract workers back to the office.** The Task Force recommends the creation of a CEO business roundtable to help with these efforts - both advising the creation of public policy, but also helping in recruitment efforts to fill vacant Evanston office spaces but also help spark the development of the new office building on Davis Street and perhaps elsewhere. Daytime office employees is what drives the level of restaurants, retailers, and service providers in all of the business districts, but particularly in downtown Evanston.

This effort is the most important of all of the recovery efforts. Ensuring a strong office market provides a stable level of property tax revenue benefitting the entire community, it provides the spending power of the daytime office employee to shop and dine and exercise. And it creates the vitality that attracts visitors and guests to mutually enjoy the amenities that are popping up to serve this population including Fountain Square and the proposed Bookman's Alley renovation. Offices also generate hotel room nights from corporate guests and corporate meetings. Spend time at the corner of Grove and Sherman to see the impact Rotary International has on this community. Do the same at Sherman and Clark to see NU staff, faculty and students descend on downtown.

An active approach to recovery is recommended and should include:

- Key offerings to attract office tenants are modern facilities. (820 Davis, Fountain Square office building)
- Opportunity to assist creative industries with programs that offer non-traditional spaces and rent assistance.
- Hire a firm to assist with a needs assessment, strategy development and tactical planning.
- Reduce corporate tax rate for 5 years.
- Wage reimbursement.
- Training tax credits
- Workforce organizations
- Present our strengths (and weaknesses with work plan identified to address)
- Form a CEO business roundtable / public-private partnership - creating corporate citizenry.
- Encourage Special Service Areas (e.g. Downtown Evanston) to create programs/events solely with daytime workers in mind.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Create a Long Lasting Workforce Development Strategy

An equitable recovery is a priority. The Taskforce has heard this from participants, community members, elected officials, and other pandemic recovery sector taskforces. Evanston's unemployment rate leading into the pandemic was approximately 3%, the level that most economists would consider "full employment." That is, everyone seeking a job is employed and/or transitioning to finding new work. The problem with this statistic is that it doesn't address the inequities in minority communities who disproportionately work in lower wage industries either due to issues of educational attainment or structural racism (i.e. underemployed due to inability to break into new industries). Some give up entirely on the job search and are therefore not included in the data.

Evanston is served by a number of workforce development agencies and non-profits whose missions are committed to helping train individuals for higher paying jobs outside of the service industry. This includes traditional trades/vocations. However, these efforts could be improved through better coordination between these advocates, the City of Evanston, and the private sector, including our largest employers in the healthcare and education sectors.

The Taskforce recommends **quickly forming a coordinated effort to implement a new Evanston workforce development partnership that incorporates:**

- A Comprehensive study of unemployed/underemployed in Evanston
- Input from a CEO business roundtable
- Coordination of existing job training programs (i.e. YJC, ETHS, City of Evanston, Northwestern)
- Hiring a full time city staff person to help coordinate
- Providing the funding to help with training spaces, materials, and coursework
- Strong coordination and curriculum development with Oakton Community College, Northwestern University and others.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Rebuild Tourism

Evanston will incrementally see a return of leisure and business travelers. Drive-in, regional leisure travel will fuel the first phase of recovery through 2021. The second phase of recovery is likely to occur in Quarter 2, 2021, with small and medium meetings and events. Interest in strong in sourcing meeting and event leads into Evanston venues which are assuming full capacities starting mid-to-late summer. Evanston's ability to host larger meeting will be hampered with the Hilton Orrington offline.

Currently, restaurants that survived the pandemic are experiencing robust business but will have staffing shortages throughout the summer. Incremental improvement of regional travel, Northwestern University running with all students on campus and all athletic and performing and visual arts venues fully open as well as offices have workers return to downtown offices will show positive growth. Support of the industry and revitalization of the restaurant and retail sector will be key to Evanston returning to pre-pandemic visitor numbers. Business travel revenue is unlikely to return to a 2019 level until 2024.

The Task Force recommends quickly forming a coordinated effort to focus on creating a Tourism & Hospitality Committee to oversee the following initiatives:

- Remediation of hotel properties used for temporary housing assistance
- Plan large scale events/fests (i.e. lakefront music & arts fest)
- Dedicated marketing campaign for Evanston hotels for both businesses and leisure travel.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Improve Government Service Delivery

Government has an important role in the immediate and long term recovery of Evanston's economy. The federal government has been critical to helping Evanston businesses survive the pandemic with the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). The State of Illinois provided Business Interruption Grants (BIG) and other tax incentive programs.

Locally, the City of Evanston allocated funding to LEND and modified the terms of several grants and loan programs to expedite delivery of funding. To help restaurants, the City of Evanston also modified sidewalk cafe regulations extending the season and waving fees. Recently, the City of Evanston City Council approved a major change to its zoning code to expedite review and approval standards for new businesses to help fill vacant storefronts.

The Task Force recommends that **business leaders, non-profits, and local elected officials to continue to advocate for an active government role in the pandemic recovery.** The four areas government can assist are:

- Regulation
- Taxation
- Incentives
- Advocacy

Recommendations:

- Continue to review city ordinances related to opening and operating businesses in Evanston.
- Advocate for Cook County Assessor commercial property tax relief
- Support the recommendations of this report with funding and changes to the City Code, where appropriate.

Regulation Changes

- Offer free on-street parking for a minimum of one hour, two hours preferred. The current license plate scanning would replace the traditional method of tire marking. The revenue lost from the first hour or two of parking could be made up with higher parking citations for those who violate the free parking. Free parking for customers is the number one request from storefront business owners.
- Create more 15 minutes free parking locations. These were helpful during the peak of the pandemic and will continue to be as consumer behavior slowly returns to "normal"
- Support long term elimination of special use requirements for Type 2 Restaurants. The dining business has changed dramatically to a "fast casual" model.
- Allow for live-work at ground level. Convert ground floor spaces to residential but keep the commercial storefront with a small commercial portion that the resident works in. complying with current use standards (i.e. retail, small office, indoor commercial recreation/gym, etc)
- Continue to allow sales of alcohol with curbside/pick up
- Work creatively to expand the plan submitted for outdoor dining (e.g. permanent installation of outdoor dining on Custer Avenue, improved sidewalk patios throughout the city)

DRAFT

RECOMMENDATION 7: Create Meaningful Partnerships

As Mayor Hagerty stressed from the very beginning of the COVID-19 public health emergency, Evanston's recovery will require a "whole community approach." Evanston is not lacking resources, nor are its businesses or community members lacking vision or willingness to help. The Task Force recommends putting this mindset into action by focusing on improving community engagement, soliciting ideas from a broader base of community members, including our corporate citizens.

Recommendations:

- Create an economic report to establish a baseline from which to measure recovery. This may require partnerships with Northwestern University or community members in the field of economics. Understanding Evanston economic output, by industry sector, is critical to understanding where limited resources should be focused. This data would supplement readily available indicators including unemployment, sales tax, and property tax data.
- Convene a CEO business roundtable led by Evanston's largest companies. Evanston community members and Evanston-based businesses have a mutual interest in our sustainable recovery. Smaller businesses are already organized through Special Service Areas and merchant district organizations and the chamber of commerce. Absent from the conversation are our largest employers. The Task Force believes that the largest businesses can help positively influence matters involving workforce development, public transit, parking, taxation, daytime office worker quality of life - all of which ultimately benefits the taxpayers and community members who reside in Evanston.
- Actively create a pro-business environment by coordinating the public regulatory and public service environment with market-based realities - ultimate creating a pro business narrative that all stakeholders have bought into. This will require the City of Evanston directors and staff at all levels help create a pro business culture that is mutually beneficial to the entire community. Specifically, the City of Evanston and private sector representatives might collaborate on incentives (e.g. TIF) programs that make a meaningful difference for business formation and retention. Planning and zoning staff along with landlords and property managers might consider meeting to share concerns they have about property conditions, outdoor dining, and tenant use mix. Business owners and landlords could coordinate with City human services staff on matters of workforce development, labor constraints, homeless outreach, etc.
- Coordinate a sustainable and equitable economic recovery by convening a meeting, or series of meetings with business leadership, SSA's, and other community members to create a means for more equitable decision making and helping create a business community more reflective of our city's racial diversity. This includes an intentional effort to focus procurement expenditures locally, with minority and women-owned businesses.

- Encourage accountability from community stakeholders. We are all partners - landlords, Northwestern University, community members (renters and homeowners), public transit agencies, government officials. Periodic meetings with stakeholders with actionable outcomes will keep the community engaged. Retailers report discontent with labor market constraints, taxes, parking, rents. Office-based businesses have similar concerns. Both would like to see Chicago Transit Authority extend express train hours to improve the quality of life of employees who use transit but to also improve opportunities for after work business expenditures (e.g. happy hour, errands, gym memberships)
- Homeless Task Force - We are experiencing a major health crisis. Covid has resulted in more people losing their home. Securing funding for 2 years to hire a Connections for the Homeless outreach worker to work in MDM and DTE is a good place to start. Homelessness is not going away. This Task Force recognizes we were not tasked with solving this or working on affordable housing. Members of this Task Force have a key role in place management. Ambassador programs are core to place management in districts with many unhoused individuals. This would be new to Evanston and we believe essential as we collaborate with other NGOs to lower the population of homeless.

DRAFT

APPENDIX A: INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC REALM

\$4.25 MILLION

Public Spaces have an important role for recovery. We must proceed with caution as the idea of “gathering” goes against what we have been practicing for over a year. Public parks and recreation areas are already known amenities to Evanston residents. The focus here should be on those spaces not already seen as a “sanctioned” public space like our alleys and streets and parking spaces and garages. American cities have long resisted allowing a mixture of uses in public space, with regulations blocking activities that would be acceptable in many other parts of the world. Now is the time to rethink those regulations—and fast.

Improvements to the viaducts and street lighting in business districts/areas will provide both aesthetic and safety benefits. The viaducts along the Metra/Union Pacific rail line are an eyesore and located in high-traffic business districts. The paint, some of it lead paint, is chipping and falling into the streets and sidewalks beneath the viaducts. Repairing, cleaning and painting the viaducts in the business districts will enhance the streetscape for both residents and visitors in the commercial districts and residential neighborhoods.

Funding should be provided to clean and paint the viaducts in the business districts. Note that Davis Street and Dempster Street will be repaired by Metra/Union Pacific in 2021 due to severe lead paint issues.

Project Management: City of Evanston and single vendor managed by each SSA

Infrastructure Improvements

- Viaducts | \$1,500,000
- Street Light Improvements | \$1,250,000

Public Realm Improvements

- **Streetscape Improvements | \$500,000**
 - Enhanced plants for planter beds
 - Uniform garbage/recycling containers (\$400 each)
 - Branded Bike Racks (\$310 per bike rack)
- **Enhanced Lighting in Public Spaces | \$350,000**
 - Festoon lighting spanning streets, or public plazas
 - Uplighting at the base of trees
- **Wayfinding System | \$250,000**
 - Update existing and/or create new signage with new branding
- **New Mural & Public Art | \$150,000**
 - Audit of existing murals and public art
 - New murals or public throughout Evanston
- **Year-round Outdoor Market | \$100,000**
 - Infrastructure equipment (kiosks)

APPENDIX B: BUSINESS ATTRACTION & RETENTION

\$3,000,000

In Evanston, SSAs, Economic Development Department, Chamber of Commerce and other business nonprofits provide support to existing businesses through technical assistance/capacity building workshops, marketing and advertising campaigns, and special events. In addition to expanding these programs, there are other ways to attract new businesses and support entrepreneurs in Evanston. Providing support to entrepreneurs and start-ups will help grow a creative and unique business culture and in turn, make it more desirable for other businesses to open in Evanston.

Project Management: Economic Development Division, Downtown Evanston, Main-Dempster Mile and Central Street Evanston

- **Storefront Modernization Program | \$500,000**
 - Exterior or interior improvements
 - Website or e-commerce capabilities
- **Tenant Improvement (TI) Program | \$200,000**
 - Assist landlords in preparing vacant spaces for tenant attraction
- **Hotel Remediation | \$1,000,000**
 - Remediation of hotels used for temporary housing during the height of Covid-19
- **Retail Incubator Program for BIPOC businesses | \$500,000**
 - Working with a consultant to create a program specifically designed to assist existing or new BIPOC businesses.
- **Permanent Outdoor Dining Buildout "Get Your Business Outside" Grant Program | \$500,000**
 - Provide grants of up to \$10,000 for businesses to expand outdoor business operations
- **Art Installations in Available Storefronts | \$25,000**
 - Work with local artists and designers to create art installations in vacant storefronts
- **Retail Pop Up Project | \$30,000**
 - Work with property owners to create pop-up markets in vacant spaces and support emerging artists, business owners and entrepreneurs
- **Capacity Building Workshops | \$30,000**
 - Annual plan for ongoing technical workshops (Grow Your Business on Google, Website enhancements, Social Media, etc.)
- **Purchase of Demographic & Psychographic Data | \$20,000**
 - Market Study (including daytime worker information)
 - Pedestrian counters (\$5000/counter)
 - Dedicated website for business attractions

APPENDIX C: MARKETING & TOURISM

\$600,000

Investment in a detailed Retail District Analysis and Urban Design and Branding Study to address the needs of Evanston's mature and burgeoning commercial districts. There needs to be an integrated approach to enhancing the commercial districts. In the last 10 years there has been millions of dollars invested in new commercial, retail and residential development, and a progressive government that is focusing on making Evanston a model for sustainable "green" energy technology and innovation, Evanston is poised to be an even greater 21st Century City in this region. However, the city brand currently lacks an active message or exciting environment and is often empty on weekends and in the evenings; downtown specifically.

Project management: Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau, Downtown Evanston

- **Branding & Identity study | \$250,000**
 - City wide branding study that will be used by City of Evanston, business organizations
- **Destination marketing campaign (utilizing new city wide branding) | \$175,000**
 - Business/Leisure visitation including conferences and social events
 - Photography & Video
 - Participation in regional tourism marketing campaigns
 - New Business attraction
 - New Office attraction
- **Large scale events/fests | \$300,000**
 - Lakefront Music Fest
 - Fountain Square programming
 - Mural Art Tour
 - Neighborhood concerts, movies, markets
- **Evanston Gift Card | \$200,000**
 - Kickstart sales of Evanston Gift Card

APPENDIX D: CITY SERVICES, PARTNERSHIPS, EVANSTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS \$2,000,000

Government has an important role in the immediate and long term recovery of Evanston's economy. Locally, the City of Evanston allocated funding to LEND and modified the terms of several grants and loan programs to expedite delivery of funding. To help restaurants, the City of Evanston also modified sidewalk cafe regulations extending the season and waving fees. Recently, the City of Evanston City Council agreed to consider major changes to its zoning code to expedite review and approval standards for new businesses to help fill vacant storefronts.

The Task Force recommends that City of Evanston staff and elected officials to continue to advocate for an active government role in the pandemic recovery. The programs listed below rely on regulatory changes and city support.

- **Nighttime Parking Program (\$1,350,000)**
 - Free parking in surface lots after 5pm to stimulate restaurants (1 year program)
- **Free 2 hour parking in commercial districts (\$TBD)**
 - parking fees begin at beginning of 3rd hour (metered / pay station / app)
 - Cost to be determined
 - Recovery funds pay for parking revenue loss
- **Support Howard Street SSAs (\$150,000)**
 - Staff time and consultant fees for establishing new SSAs
- **Ambassador Program with Connections for the Homeless (\$210,000)**
 - Staff

APPENDIX E: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

\$500,000

Evanston is served by a number of workforce development agencies and non-profits whose missions are committed to helping train individuals for higher paying jobs outside of the service industry. This includes traditional trades/vocations. However, these efforts could be improved through better coordination between these advocates, the City of Evanston, and the private sector, including our largest employers in the healthcare and education sectors.

Project Management: Mayor's Employer Advisory Council, Evanston Chamber of Commerce

The Task Force recommends quickly forming a coordinated effort to implement a new Evanston workforce development partnership that incorporates:

- **Comprehensive study of unemployed/underemployed in Evanston**
- **CEO business roundtable identify job opportunities**
- **Coordinate existing job training programs (i.e. YJC, ETHS, City of Evanston, Northwestern)**
- **Identify Funding for City Workforce Development Staff**