

PARTNERSHIP, CITY & COUNTY ANNOUNCE FORMATION OF TOPEKA, SHAWNEE COUNTY COMMUNITY RECOVERY TASKFORCE

TOPEKA, KS – April 16, 2020 – The [Greater Topeka Partnership](#) has partnered with the [City of Topeka](#) and [Shawnee County](#) to form a new collaborative community taskforce, Topeka, Shawnee County Community Recovery. This team will work to ensure recovery across all sectors of the economy following the COVID-19 pandemic. Taskforce members include Chair Michelle Cuevas-Stubblefield, senior vice president of strategy, Greater Topeka Partnership, as well as co-chairs: Topeka Mayor Michelle De La Isla; Dusty Nichols, incident commander, Shawnee County COVID-19 Response Team; Dr. Gianfranco Pezzino, Shawnee County health officer, Shawnee County Health Department; Linda Ochs, director, Shawnee County Health Department; and Errin Mahan, interim director, Shawnee County Department of Emergency Management, Planning Section Chief. A press conference to formally introduce this taskforce will be held via Zoom on Thursday, April 16 at 5 p.m.; attendees may join the meeting by following [this link](#) and entering **Meeting ID: 922 1175 7084, Password: 153732**.

“We are continuing to respond to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic,” said Mayor De La Isla. “It’s clear that this situation isn’t going to go away overnight, but as we respond to this crisis, we must start focusing on what our recovery plan should look like. Right now, leadership must identify the issues our community will be facing so that, over time, we can address these and create actionable, long-lasting solutions.”

Shawnee County Recovery will have five focuses:

- **Economic Recovery**
- **Health and Behavioral Health**
- **Community and Education**
- **Government, Infrastructure and Public Safety**
- **Funding and Philanthropic**

“These are unprecedented times. Our community is combating the day-to-day challenges put upon us by this pandemic,” said Michelle Cuevas-Stubblefield, senior vice president of strategy for the Greater Topeka Partnership. “By planning for our future, we are able to regain some control of our situation. And by bringing more community leaders together,

we are able to brainstorm even more innovative solutions to our current challenges and the ones that lay ahead.”

“The Topeka, Shawnee County COVID-19 Response Team is very concerned about how we respond and recover. We know that our collective efforts are paying off in flattening the curve,” said Dusty Nichols, incident commander, Shawnee County COVID-19 Response Team. “We need that cooperation intact going forward. We need to strategically plan now for our recovery to ensure future success.”

The taskforce has met to discuss the framework of the initiative. Group members will invite community leaders, including business leadership, to join future conversations on community recovery. Additional teams will be formed to focus on recommendations and next steps. Economic Recovery will be central to this effort. Leading that team will be Molly Howey, president of GO Topeka, and Freddy Mawyin, research manager for the Greater Topeka Partnership.

“The Economic Recovery team is an important piece of the entire recovery plan, focused on restoring our economy and our community wellness,” said Freddy Mawyin. “This team will have the combined support of our local officials, business leaders and the Greater Topeka Partnership. It is imperative we do this together; individually we will not solve the economic issues in our region, but I am optimistic that by having a community-based, data-driven approach, we will nurture our economy in an efficient and effective way.”

“There are many lessons to be learned from this pandemic, and I suspect more will arise over time,” said Matt Pivarnik, CEO of the Greater Topeka Partnership. “But by moving forward, together, will we be able to repair our economy, and restore our community. We will get people back to work, reopen our stores and restaurants, and reignite the progress that we have fought for over the past five years.”

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Bob Ross at Bob.Ross@TopekaPartnership.com.