



**Star City Strong
Recovery & Resiliency
Advisory Panel Recommendations**

September 20, 2021

Letter from Mayor Sherman P. Lea, Sr. and Vice-Mayor Trish White-Boyd

In early 2020, COVID-19 arrived in Roanoke. Since its arrival, Roanoke has gone from just a few cases to more than 10,000, unfortunately accompanied by more than 300 hospitalizations and more than 200 deaths. Alongside, this tragic human toll have been significant impacts on small businesses, learning outcomes, mental health and continued strain on our healthcare and public safety infrastructure. The impact of COVID-19 has been disproportionate – affecting seniors, people of color, minority owned businesses, women and youth to a greater extent than others. Many of these inequities existed prior to the Pandemic and were merely amplified with its arrival. Issues such as mental health, substance use, affordable and safe housing, access to economic opportunity, educational attainment, access to affordable fresh food, homelessness and safety have all become more challenging and in need of more substantive and urgent responses.

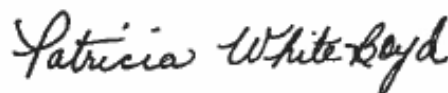
Fortunately, Roanoke is not a community that cowers in the face of challenges. Rather, as a seven-time All-America City, we act with compassion in an authentic and meaningful manner. From the very arrival of the virus, the community has come together – health care, schools, non-profits, businesses, individuals, places of worship and local government. All have worked tirelessly to respond to the virus and its many impacts and to prepare the foundation for the community's recovery. Beginning with an action-oriented framework – Star City Strong: Response, Recovery, Resiliency, the community has come together to provide financial assistance, learning support for youth, business grants, food, shelter, vaccine clinics, bilingual outreach, grants to arts and cultural institutions, and more. The Council has ensured community members actively guide how federal funds are used in our efforts, first with the formation of the Star City Strong Recovery Fund Task Force and deployment of funds received through the CARES Act and most recently with the formation of the Star City Strong Recovery and Resiliency Advisory Panel, offering recommendations related to funds received through the American Rescue Plan Act.

This Advisory Panel met throughout the months of July and August, held a public hearing, conducted a survey and reviewed the notes from a series of community conversations convened by the City Council. These efforts resulted in a number of recommendations intended to ensure federal funds received by the City result not only results in recovery but in transformation – a future that is better than the past, one that is more just and equitable for individuals, households, businesses and neighborhoods in our community. This dynamic group of thirty-six appointed community representatives took their charge seriously and worked diligently to arrive at the enclosed recommendations. This effort combined with the work of the Council through its Strategic Plan and annual budget will help ensure our community recovers from COVID-19 a more resilient community - better prepared for similar shocks in the future.

For these efforts we say thank you to the Advisory Panel members for doing their part to ensure we remain Star City Strong!



Mayor Sherman P. Lea, Sr.



Vice-Mayor Trish White-Boyd

Introduction

In July 2020, the Star City Strong Recovery Fund Task Force made its recommendations to the City Council for use of funds received through the Federal CARES Act. These recommendations led to the City's investment of more than \$16 million in:

- Community Health
- Local Economy
- Safety Net
- Youth & Education
- Essential Services & Public Safety

In May of 2021, the City received the first of two installments of funding it will receive through the Federal American Rescue Plan Act. In total the City anticipates receiving approximately \$64.5 million in funding. This is accompanied by approximately \$51 million being provided to the Roanoke Public School Division through the same Act. Further, the City is eligible to compete for significantly greater resources through programs administered by the Commonwealth and various Federal agencies.

In July of 2021, the City Council formed the Star City Strong: Recovery and Resiliency Advisory Panel (Resolution attached) co-chaired by the Mayor and Vice-Mayor. The Council appointed 36 community members to accompany the Mayor, Vice-Mayor and City Manager to serve on the Panel. The stated objective of the Advisory Panel was "to consider the challenges confronting the City from the COVID-19 pandemic disaster and the opportunities available to the community through the American Rescue Plan Act, and to make recommendations to City Council regarding the use of the funds". The Advisory Panel worked diligently to achieve this objective in a short time-frame. This report represents the recommendations of the Advisory Panel.

The Members of the Star City Strong Recovery and Resiliency Advisory Panel are:

Co-Chairs

Mayor Sherman P. Lea, Sr.
Vice-Mayor Trish White-Boyd

Ex-Officio

City Manager Bob Cowell

Citizens-at-Large

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| • Beth Doughty | • Yoedie Swain | • Marie Muddiman |
| • John Fishwick | • Mark Lazar | • Jeff Grafeo |
| • Renee Brown | • Karen Pillis | • Rob Leonard |
| • Betty Jean Wolfe | • Eileen Guerry | • Annie Harvey |
| • Lorraine Lange | • Vance Overstreet | • Anna Goltz |

- Latrice Hilton
- Dr. Jim Sears
- Cheryl Hilton
- John Cornthwait, Jr.
- John Lugar
- Irisha Goodman
- Judith Dickerson
- Jerel Rhodes
- Abby Hamilton
- Karen Mason
- Rev. William Lee
- Karen Michalski-Karney
- Jeremy Holmes
- John Hull
- Dr. Liz Ackley
- Carole Tarrant

Roanoke Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

- Brenda Hale

Roanoke Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

- Bishop Edward Mitchell for Perneller Chubb-Wilson

Roanoke Hispanic/Latinx Community

- Esteban Duran-Ballen

Youth Services Citizens Board Representatives

- Jayveon Tucker
- Kennady Wade

The Advisory Panel was assisted in its efforts by several members of the City of Roanoke staff as noted in the following:

- Angie O'Brien, Chief Strategy Officer
- Laura Carini, Assistant City Attorney
- Susie McCoy, City Clerk
- Clarence Grier, Deputy City Manager
- Brent Robertson, Assistant City Manager
- Chris Chittum, Assistant City Manager - Apprentice
- Amelia Merchant, Finance Director



Background & Context

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. On March 12, 2020 Governor Northam declared a State of Emergency for the Commonwealth of Virginia. On March 17, 2020 a local State of Emergency was declared by the City of Roanoke and so began the first stage related to the pandemic. Roanoke approached this unprecedented public health and economic crisis within the context of three stages – Response, Recovery, and Resiliency. While each is unique in their challenges and necessary actions, overlap is expected as the community transitions from one stage to the next. Each stage is further explained in the following:

Response

With the enactment of the local State of Emergency on March 17, 2020, the City of Roanoke officially initiated its response to COVID-19. As of the preparation of this document, the City remains to a certain degree in the Response Stage while also fully engaged in the Recovery Stage. The Response Stage included a number of significant actions designed primarily to address the public health needs of the community and the City workforce and secondarily to mitigate economic impacts associated with the virus. Notable actions in addition to the earlier issued State of Emergency declarations have included activation of emergency operations, closure and safe re-opening of municipal facilities and cancellation of most civic events and public meetings, implementation of community-wide extreme physical distancing, alterations in public service delivery, COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, awareness and distribution of vaccines, emergency financial support to small businesses and vulnerable populations, municipal expenditure controls, and various policy adoptions.

Recovery

It is necessary that the community fully engage in the Recovery Stage, even while continuing to respond to the immediate health and safety needs of our community. The Recovery Stage is informed by data and guidance from local, state and federal sources. The early focus of the Recovery Stage was supporting the “re-opening” of the local economy and municipal operations in a safe manner and supporting local businesses and impacted individuals and families. Recovery continues to address these immediate needs and where possible to do so in a manner that may be transformational to those impacted and to the entire community and further to do so in a manner that helps make residents, households, neighborhoods, businesses and the community more resilient to similar shocks in the future.

Resiliency

As has been the case historically, Roanoke will face similar challenges in the future that place the community’s health and well-being at great risk. Most immediately is the continued risk of resurgence of the COVID-19 virus over the upcoming months or even years. With recovery well underway, actions are needed to fortify our community and local economy against similar future shocks, to the extent practical. As the current pandemic has demonstrated, such crises

rarely limit their impacts to a single jurisdiction or geography. Actions in this stage therefore must be fully integrated in similar efforts at the regional, state and national levels.



At the time of preparing this report and forwarding the associated recommendations the most recent variant of COVID-19 continued to rage across the Nation, more than thirty-nine million Americans had tested positive for COVID-19 – nearly 10,000 in the City of Roanoke, and more than 637,000 had succumbed to its impact – more than 500 in our region. In addition to the loss of life, the Nation and our area have been impacted by unprecedented economic loss and associated unemployment. At the height of the Pandemic more than 12% of the residents of the City of Roanoke were unemployed with many of those in jobs in hospitality and restaurants. A disproportionate number of those impacted by the economic losses are Hispanic or African American.

Businesses throughout the Nation, Virginia and in our area have been greatly impacted. Small businesses and those engaged in hospitality and food service have been especially impacted. Gig Workers, performing artists, and arts and culture groups have likewise been impacted with venues just now reopening after long periods of closure. Area non-profits have seen unprecedented demands on their services for access to food, emergency health care, and requests for assistance with basic needs such as housing, utilities, and transportation.

For the past several years Roanoke has experienced significant economic growth led by the high-growth sectors of health care, biomedical research and higher education. These have been accompanied by growth in tourism, hospitality and advanced manufacturing. What has emerged in the past decade is a strong city with a vibrant urban core set amongst great outdoor amenities and beauty. It has been known for some time that not all in our community have participated in this recent resurgence. The City and network of social service providers and non-profits have worked diligently to address the issues of poverty. COVID-19 laid bare the depth of these challenges and the more recently, demonstrations around racism and inequities have amplified these even more.

What is needed is not just recovery – not a return to what the pre-COVID world was like but a new recovery – one that regains the momentum we were experiencing but in a manner that transforms our community, addressing the inequities that kept residents, families, and businesses from fully participating in the success of our community. The work of the Advisory Panel, combined with the work the City Council continues through their Strategic Plan and annual budget, is one step in shaping this new, better, stronger Star City.

Star City Strong Recovery Fund

With the adoption of the Star City Strong Recovery Plan and subsequent implementation of the recommendations for the Star City Strong Recovery Fund Task Force, the City Council has made available millions in funds to support recovery. The bulk of this support initially came from funding made available through the CARES Act passed by Congress last year and made available to the City through the State last summer. In total, the City received more than \$16 million in CARES Act funding. The City expended its total allocation by the end of 2020, as initially required by the Act, aligned with the recommendations of the Task Force.

In addition to CARES Act funds the City received special allocations of CDBG funds. Most of these funds were immediately distributed to local non-profits to aid in the Response Phase of the City's efforts. However, a portion of these funds were allocated to support small businesses aligned with the recommendations of the Task Force. The City also received special allocations of ESG (Emergency Shelter Grant) funding from HUD to focus on addressing homelessness and prevention of homelessness. As with the special CDBG allocation, a portion of these funds were immediately put to use providing housing support for homeless individuals and families in need of housing during times of self-isolating or quarantining due to COVID. The remaining funds were made available to support the recommendations of the Task Force.

In addition to these funds the CARES Act provided approximately \$6 million in aid to the Roanoke Public School Division and \$20 million to the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. Valley Metro, the City's transit operator received an additional \$8 million in aid which was used to support operations during the Response Phase.

More recently, through the American Rescue Plan Act passed by Congress earlier this year, the City anticipates receipt of additional funds to replace lost revenue and to initiate programs and projects to support the recovery of the community. Similar to the CARES Act, these funds come in the form of direct allocation to the City (\$64.5 million over two years), direct allocation to Roanoke City Schools Division (\$51 million) and through special CDBG, HOME and ESG allotments. Further, the Act provides billions in additional aid to the Commonwealth and to various Federal agencies, portions of which, the City may be in a position to compete for.

Combined, these funds represent the opportunity for a significant response to the recovery needs of the community and to build its resiliency against similar shocks in the future. The recommendations of the Advisory Panel are instrumental in determining the most effective use of the funds received.

The Process

Beginning in June and extending through July, City Council and the City Administration conducted a series of stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings. Through these efforts, more than 100 individuals representing a wide diversity of perspectives offered their preliminary thoughts about the challenges confronting the community as we recover from COVID-19 and how the funds received by the City, could best be used to address these challenges. The information gleaned from these interactions formed one of the starting points for the work of the Advisory Panel. On July 28th the Advisory Panel started meeting. They met a total of seven times and conducted a public hearing. At each meeting they were presented data and information and participated in a series of facilitated discussions regarding the funds, the restrictions around the sources of funds, need, etc. These discussions generated a list of possible initiatives and projects that could aid the community's efforts at recovery while building resiliency. During the last two meetings the Advisory Panel focused on reducing the list of possible initiatives and projects to a list of prioritized investments.

This process of prioritization benefitted from an overall goal and was guided by a set of principles established early in the process. These are noted in the following:

We will transform our community as we support recovery from COVID-19 and help residents, households, businesses, neighborhoods and thus the community to be more resilient against similar disruptions in the future.

We do so acknowledging those most impacted by COVID-19:

- Most Vulnerable – youth, seniors, impoverished, those with disabilities, working mothers
- Small Businesses – especially those in tourism and hospitality and minority owned
- Health Care Providers
- Workers Delivering Essential Services
- Educators
- Arts and Cultural Institutions

We do so aligned with the following principles:

- Compliance with Act and Treasury Guidance
- Further City's Objectives as stated in the Strategic Plan, Comprehensive Plan and other adopted policies
- Address known disparities and promote equity and inclusion
- Outcomes achievable with single investment – not requiring recurring expense
- Leverage other available funds, programs and initiatives – avoid duplication where possible
- Have the potential for transformational change

Use of these guiding principles helped the Advisory Panel refine or enhance their recommendations to ensure equitable outcomes and reinforced the need to be as inclusive as possible when each of the prioritized initiatives and projects are rolled out for implementation.

The Advisory Panel concluded their work at their meeting on September 1, grouped their recommendations into three priority investment areas, each with recommended “recovery” and “resiliency” investments. These were forwarded to the City Council for consideration at the September 20 Council meeting.

Recommendations

The Advisory Panel recommends that the City Council support the community’s recovery and help build its resiliency by investing in programs and initiatives that benefit:

- **People**
- **Places** \implies sustaining and enhancing **prosperity** and **health & well-being** for all
- **Governance**

Initially, it is recommended that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the allocated \$64.5 million - \$48.38 million be invested – 15% dedicated to Governance Investments - \$7.257 million, leaving \$41.123 million for investments in People and Places – no more than \$8.225 million for recovery investments and no less than \$32.896 million for resiliency investments. It is recommended the remaining \$16.12 million be programmed concurrent with development of the City’s FY23 budget.

It is imperative that funded investments reinforce one another to maximize their transformational benefit. This reinforcement acknowledges the linkages between equity, health and wellness outcomes, economic opportunity and resiliency. Further, it is important to acknowledge that recovery investments should stabilize situations so that resiliency investments have the greatest opportunity for success and sustainability.



People – *Ensure no one in our community lacks the essentials of shelter, food, and personal safety. Provide opportunities for residents of all ages, ability levels and backgrounds to engage fully in civic, economic and social life.*

Opportunities

- *COVID-19 Mitigation and Vaccination*
- *Homelessness*
- *Gun Violence Intervention*
- *Workforce/Skills Development*
- *Food Insecurity*
- *Entrepreneurial Support*
- *Wealth Building/Counseling*
- *Accessible and Affordable Technology*
- *Inclusive Economic Development*
- *Substance Use Disorder, Prevention, Treatment and Recovery*
- *Mobility*
- *Disparities – Health Outcomes, Economic Opportunity, Education Attainment, etc.*

Recovery Investments (no more than \$2.5 million)

- Continued support of COVID-19 mitigation measures – vaccination, PPE, testing/tracing/isolating, etc.
- Household Financial Support – rental assistance, mortgage assistance, unpaid bills, etc.
- Mental Health and Substance Addiction Treatment and Recovery Services

Resiliency Investments (no less than \$10 million)

- 1) A Big-Lift – Workforce/Skills Development Pathways Initiative – An initiative intended to identify needs of employers in high-growth, high-potential sectors and gaps that may exist in the local workforce and align development and training programs for youth, unemployed and underemployed to secure the skills and credentials necessary to fill the gaps in the local workforce.
- 2) A Big-Lift – Enhanced Mobility (transit shelters, sidewalks, demonstration routes, etc.) – An initiative intended to enhance current mobility options and the experience for the user of transit with acceleration of transit shelter construction, construction of sidewalks connecting high-use transit locations with concentrations of residences and/or activity areas, and the introduction of demonstration routes expanding service areas or increasing service hours, frequency, etc.
- 3) A Big-Lift – Violence Interruption Initiatives – Continuation and expansion of the anti-violence activities currently underway through RPD, the Gun Violence Prevention Commission and others with a particular focus on law enforcement, violence interruption, anti-gang activities, and prevention efforts. Significant in this effort will be a focus on youth.

- 4) A Big-Lift – Food System/Food Hub – An enhancement of current food access programs to include an expansion of existing food hubs, the urban agriculture network, expanded farmer’s markets, expansion of financial incentive for low-income shoppers, etc.
- 5) A Big-Lift – Support Leadership Development Initiative NW/SE – An initiative to support the development of leadership capacity among residents in NW and SE Roanoke to guide the deployment of health interventions arising from the most recent Community Health Needs Assessment – includes payment for service and removal of barriers to participation such as transportation and child care.



Places – *Support stabilization and continued vitality of neighborhoods, nurturing “complete neighborhoods” and “neighborhood centers” along with Downtown and the City’s Business Districts and the small businesses located within.*

Opportunities

- *Small business*
- *Arts/Cultural institutions*
- *Affordable and safe housing*
- *Parks, OpenSpace and Recreation*
- *Regional Outdoor Amenities*
- *Tourism Marketing*
- *Infrastructure*
- *Sustainability/Climate Adaptation*
- *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*

Recovery Investments (no more than \$1.5 million)

- Small Business Grants
- Non-Profit Grants
- Arts & Culture Grants

Resiliency Investments (no less than \$25 million)

- 1) A Big-Lift - NW Grocery/Community Hub – A public-private initiative serving as a community hub located in the Melrose area anchored by a grocery store with other retail outlets (micro-retail, restaurant, etc.) and may include non-profit uses such as a community health clinic. The initiative could involve public acquisition of land redevelopment and expansion of existing structures and initial programming subsidies. The initiative would involve partnership with other public and non-profit partners. Addresses minority business development and support in an area where unemployment and business failures were high in the area pre-COVID and increased during COVID-19. Could address access to health care services and fresh healthy food, in an area that has a significantly lower life expectancy for the surrounding population.
- 2) A Big-Lift – Affordable, Accessible and Safe Housing – Acquisition and rehabilitation of properties, permanent supportive housing, etc. – An initiative offering a comprehensive approach at addressing affordable, accessible and safe housing in our community. The initiative may include job training/skills development in construction/trades, land acquisition, and funding for rehabilitation and/or new construction of owner-occupied affordable housing and permanent supportive housing for those transitioning out of homelessness. The initiative may involve partnership with other public, non-profit and for-profit partners. This initiative will be focused in the southeast portion of the City in an area that is a Census Qualified Tract and home to a population with high rates of unemployment and poverty.

- 3) A Big-Lift - Recreation Center – The redevelopment/reconstruction of one of the city-owned recreation centers (Eureka or Preston), both of which are more than 50 years old. The facility could include recreation space, learning and meeting space, and other areas for active and passive programming. These facilities have been ranked as the highest need in the recently completed Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- 4) A Big-Lift – Gainsboro Neighborhood Hub - An initiative that is a public-private partnership resulting in the development of a community hub in the Gainsboro neighborhood of the City in proximity to Gainsboro Road and Gilmer Avenue. The hub would consist of space for small business incubation/acceleration, entrepreneurship training, job/skills development, health clinic, etc. The hub would stabilize the neighborhood, introduce additional activities and serve as a catalyst for further investment in a Census Qualified Tract, recognized medically underserved area and home to a population with high rates of unemployment and poverty. The initiative could involve public acquisition of land redevelopment and expansion of existing structures and initial programming subsidies. The initiative would involve partnership with other public and non-profit partners. Addresses minority business development and support in an area where unemployment and business failures were high in the area pre-COVID and increased during COVID-19. Addresses job training and skills development for youth and unemployed/underemployed – all affected through COVID-19 impacts and access to health care services in an area that has a significantly lower life expectancy for the surrounding population.

Governance – *Support the continuity of government operations and the safety of municipal workers and the general public. Help equip the next generation of leaders and enhance the capacity of those already serving in such roles. Enhance awareness of and access to COVID-recovery assistance to individuals, households, businesses and organizations and neighborhoods.*

Opportunities

- *Lost Tax/Fee Revenue*
- *Facility Upgrades and PPE*
- *Leadership Development/Capacity Building*
- *Community Navigators*
- *Rebuild and Strengthen Trust*

Recovery Investments

- Recovery of lost revenue from enterprise operations – reinvestment in capital maintenance
- Technology, HVAC, etc. upgrades for municipal/city-owned properties
- Continued vaccine outreach
- Secure and distribute necessary PPE
- Administrative support
- Essential worker premium pay
- Wi-Fi Hot-Spots and Equipment at key municipally owned location
- Tourism Marketing/Conference Support

Resiliency Investments

- Support Business and Organization disaster planning – An initiative that would provide technical assistance in the development of disaster mitigation and preparedness plans for local businesses and organizations to better equip them to address future economic and health shocks.
- Capacity Building – Supporting capacity building initiatives for implementation partners.
- Outcome Tracking/Reporting – An initiative that would retain the services of an entity to identify, track and report on outcomes associated with initiatives undertaken through use of the Star City Strong Recovery Fund. This would aid in managing and adapting the program and assisting in ensuring accountability in use of funds.
- Infrastructure – Initiatives that could include stormwater projects, water projects, or other authorized infrastructure projects.

Other Considerations

As noted elsewhere in this report, there exist many opportunities for the City to seek additional funding to leverage those received directly through the American Rescue Plan Act. Where appropriate it is recommended that these opportunities be pursued. Further, there appear to be opportunities to amend or adopt policies that further advance many of the objectives of the recommended investments –for example affordable housing objectives could be furthered through zoning reform, thereby magnifying the impact of the recommended investment. It is recommended that such opportunities be identified and pursued by the City Council.

Partners, especially non-profit partners are key to the successful implementation of many of the recommended investments. The resiliency of each of these partners and their impact would be greatly enhanced by ensuring alignment around a set of commitments for any organization receiving funding through the recommendations. These include:

- Trauma informed programming
- “grass-roots” driven – leadership development/capacity building with/for served population
- Holistic and Coordinated – “plugged” into the rest of the community’s support “infrastructure”
- Neighborhood or place-based delivery

Finally, to really determine the impact of the recommended investments, it is recommended that each of the Resiliency Investments include identified program outcomes. These outcomes should be descriptive enough to determine success and are where improvements might be warranted. Regular reporting of these outcomes is important as implementation of the recommendations proceed.

Next Steps

With the Council’s final determination on the Advisory Panel’s recommendations (at the September 20 Council meeting), staff will initiate the development and implementation of the actual initiatives and projects called for in the approval. In most instances the focus will be on using existing providers and networks to maximize efficiency in delivery of these much needed funds and associated services. In a few instances new initiatives will be needed as well as perhaps new collaborations. Use of existing processes, such as that used with the Arts Commission and the Human Services Advisory Board, will be used as often as practical. The objective is rapid deployment of needed resources with as minimal bureaucracy as necessary.

It is possible that additional funds may become available either through further Congressional action, State action or philanthropic resources. If so, to the extent practical, those funds will be used to further the approved recommendations.

It is the genuine belief of the Advisory Panel that timely and effective implementation of the identified priority recommendations will have immediate and long-lasting benefit to our residents, households, institutions, businesses and neighborhoods, enabling us as a community to rapidly regain the momentum we had prior to the arrival of COVID-19 but to do so in a more equitable and just manner.

