

OPINION

Westchester County Association's Post-Pandemic Working Group will take the long view

Michael Romita, Special to the USA TODAY NETWORK

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COVID-19 poses an unprecedented challenge to the well-being of Westchester's economy. Our businesses are temporarily shuttered, our healthcare system strained, our nonprofits and educational institutions stilted and our public budgets stretched thin. We are facing tough decisions that will impact our public spending and revenue base for years to come.

While our state and local political leaders work on plans to safely re-open businesses and get people back to work, our federal lawmakers are debating another round of stimulus. In addition to more direct assistance to small businesses and workers, massive block grants to states and local governments will be critical. The National Governors Association estimates that at least \$500BB is needed simply to plug existing budget gaps created by the pandemic and New York's senators will be pushing for more. It will also be critical that New York, and Westchester in particular, receive their fair share of these funds according to respective economic impact and the damage caused by the pandemic.

Reopening our businesses and institutions will be a precursor to the necessary action. Westchester and the lower Hudson Valley is one of the state's leading economic drivers and it will need to lead the economic road back. While there will be challenges, the post-pandemic environment will also present opportunities to reevaluate and advance priorities to rebuild a stronger and more resilient economy.



Michael N. Romita of Harrison is the new president and CEO of the Westchester County Association. Romita, photographed March 2, 2020, is a former oil executive and trial attorney with the U.S. Justice Department. (Photo: Seth Harrison/The Journal News)

In order to address these challenges and opportunities head on, [the Westchester County Association has convened a Post-Pandemic Working Group \(PPWG\)](#) of businesses, non-profit, and academic leaders to help our professional institutions recover and prosper in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. Working collaboratively, the PPWG will cultivate a series of pragmatic legislative, regulatory, and developmental solutions for our region that will focus on the regional business and nonprofit issues both caused and highlighted by the current crisis.

Members of the PPWG steering committee reflect the essential need for broad representation, including local leaders from:

- Nonprofit Westchester
- BCM Corp.
- Bleakley Platt & Schmidt
- CBRE
- Cuddy & Feder LLP
- Entergy
- Mercy College
- Simone Healthcare Development
- Sterling National Bank
- Wells Fargo Bank, N.A.
- Rand Commercial
- Suburban Hospital Alliance of New York State
- White Plains Hospital

As my colleague Jan Fisher, executive director of Nonprofit Westchester and member of the PPWG steering committee remarked, “This coalescing of nonprofit and business communities, collaborating to develop solutions to the challenges we’re all facing together, is exactly what is needed to chart a course forward that will help keep our communities healthy and safe, and get our economy moving again.”

We need to address not just how we reopen the economy but also how to position Westchester and the surrounding economy going forward. This will not be over soon and we need to take the long view.

Michael Romita is the president and CEO of [the Westchester County Association](#).