

Columbia Comeback to Assist Return of Businesses

May 1, 2020

Hudson, NY – “I’m pleased to announce the formation of Columbia Comeback and looking forward to seeing the committee become a great resource for Columbia County businesses as we look ahead to the time when we can resume business activities,” said Columbia County Board of Supervisors Chairman Matt Murell on Friday.

Columbia Comeback has been tasked by Chairman Murell to serve as a resource for county businesses to “navigate the new normal and develop initiatives to help business owners adapt and respond. Although we can’t be certain when the state will allow for business to be conducted, we can plan to be prepared with Columbia Comeback in a major support role.”

Named by Chairman Murell to serve as committee co-chairs are Jeff Hunt, President of the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, and Columbia Economic Development Corporation President & CEO Michael Tucker.

Columbia Comeback committee members comprise county supervisors Robert Beaury (Germantown), Rob Lagonia (Austerlitz), and Tristya Houghtling (New Lebanon); County Clerk Holly Tanner, County Treasurer PJ Keeler, and City of Hudson Mayor Kamal Johnson; and select county representatives Ann Cooper (Tourism), Bill Black (Emergency Management), and Jack Mabb (Department of Health Director).

From the business community:

Rita Birmingham, Mount Merino Manor; Bruce Bohnsack, gTel; Annie Brody, The Crandell Theatre; John Brusie, Ginsberg’s Foods; Jay Cahalan, Columbia Memorial Health; Tom Crowell, Chatham Brewing; Carlee Drummer, Columbia-Greene Community College; and Joe Gilbert, the Berry Farm.

Also, Allison Herrington, Herrington’s; Derick LaTorre, MetzWood Insurance; Neil Howard, Taconic Hills Central School District; Bob Lucke, The Cascades; John Lee, Saturn Industries, Inc.; Marie Chambers, LookHudson; Elena Mosely, Operation Unite; and Robert Rasner, Elijah Slocum, Inc. and Inn at 34.

Chairman Murell said that in its initial phases, Columbia Comeback will look to guide the implementation of the Governor’s Guidelines for the Phased Re-Opening, facilitate communication to ensure the safe reopening of businesses, and provide resources, guidance, and assistance to businesses as they work to ramp up to full operation.

“Local health officials will be critical in this process as we look to them for their expertise on best practices,” added Murell. “We must continue to prioritize public health as we look to help restore our business community.”

Chairman Murell expects that increased testing and tracing, with business participation, will play a large role, and that businesses should prepare to operate at lower capacities as they keep employees and customers six feet apart. Businesses should plan to implement enhanced sanitation practices and utilize protective equipment such as masks and gloves, while ensuring employees do not go to work if ill, and should continue to encourage telework where possible.

“I think that understanding state regulations and how they will be implemented will be a big part of Columbia Comeback’s work in the early stages,” Chairman Murell said. “At the same time, what business sectors will be allowed to open and to what capacity will undoubtedly change on a rolling basis, based on reduced spread of the virus.”

There will be a major adjustment period to the new normal, Chairman Murell pointed out. In the early part of the reopening stage, business owners should consider how their business will change based on what they will need to do to minimize risk.

“Different industries will have very different circumstances – a true return to normal is unlikely until breakthrough treatments or a vaccine are widely available, followed by a recovery period to get back to full employment. Businesses may want to revisit their business model to evaluate what new revenue sources they may be able to create,” he said.

Chairman Murell envisions a number of potential Columbia Comeback activities, which include – but are not limited to — developing an online portal for businesses to stay up-to-date with key industry training, resource materials and other best practices in limiting community spread; providing guidance and resources to individual businesses to help them develop strategies to remain profitable; and providing business resources or hosting training sessions for future planning.

Columbia Comeback is currently setting the date of its first meeting. It will be open to the public via an online medium, as will all its future meetings.