

# MANAGEMENT REPORT

MARCH 2021

PRESENTED BY





# FROM THE DESK OF MATT PIVARNIK

Community Leaders,

It seems to me that the fog of uncertainty we found ourselves in for the better part of year is starting to lift a bit. New studies and findings are helping us better understand the virus, more vaccination options are available, our local businesses are adapting their practices, and our citizens are resilient.

It's this resiliency that is already contributing to positive shifts in our economic recovery. From what you'll see in this report alone, local retail sales are up and new jobs are on the rise. There's an exciting energy in the air. We're seeing more people returning to their offices and the downtown core.

A year into the pandemic, I genuinely want to thank you all for staying strong and sticking together, even from six feet apart.

To close out this message, I wanted to leave you with a quote from one of our new community members that came out of the Choose Topeka program.

"[This] community has been amazing and everyone has come together during these unprecedented times to help one another out," said Kristy Blake, director of the New Life Center, University of Kansas St. Francis Campus. "The people here are very friendly, and it feels like a family."

I look forward to seeing more of you in person soon!

**Thank you to HTK Architects for sponsoring this Management Report!**



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## TOPEKA RECOGNIZED AS TOP U.S. CITY FOR GEN Z RENTERS

Topeka was ranked among the top 20 most popular cities in the U.S. for Gen Z renters in 2020, according to a report published last week by RENTCafé, an online listing website for rental properties. Nearly 3 million renter applications were analyzed as part of this study, 22% were from applicants born after 1997 — also known as Generation Z, or Gen Z. The oldest of this demographic would have turned 23 in 2020.

[Learn more >](#)

## DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT WEEK ANNOUNCED

In spite of the St. Patrick's Day Parade being postponed until September 18, the downtown restaurants joined together to help create a week of events including themed food and drinks for the holiday to help continue to drive people downtown to safely celebrate. April 14 – 28 is Downtown Restaurant Week! DTI in partnership with AIM Strategies is hosting the first ever Downtown Restaurant Week. As capacity restrictions decrease for restaurants and the weather warms up this is a great opportunity to help our downtown establishments get on the other side of the pandemic.

More details to come the first full week of April!

## 2021 ANNUAL MEETING

It's official! The Greater Topeka Partnership will be holding its 2021 Annual Meeting at Everygy Plaza on Tuesday, July 20. This will be an evening event, held 4 - 7 p.m., and will include live entertainment, beer gardens and more in an open air setting.

We look forward to celebrating the power of the Partnership with you this July!

[Purchase your tickets and tables today >](#)

## CRM PROJECT

In March, work progressed on the CRM implementation project. Multiple meetings with multiple whiteboarding sessions took place to gather a holistic picture of Partnership's needs in order to design the perfect system for the organization. The group is excited to watch the system come together. There is a lot of hard work ahead of us but the end product will be worth the sweat equity.

## PLUG AND PLAY HOLDS SELECTION DAY; ANNOUNCES COHORT STARTUPS

15 out of 60 startups selected by the Plug and Play Topeka corporate partners Hill's Pet Nutrition, Cargill and Evergy pitched to a selected audience to compete for a spot in Plug and Play Topeka's first full accelerator cohort on March 24. These startups covered a wide variety of solutions including supply chain, pet food, livestock tracking, alternative proteins, energy as well as food safety, packaging and livestock microbiome. After thorough deliberations, the following companies were selected:

**Ampcontrol**  
**BIOPSIN**  
**GBatteries**  
**The Heila EDGE®**  
**NanoSpy**  
**Nutrivert**  
**Obe, Inc.**  
**StenCo**  
**Resilient Biotics**  
**Veloce Energy**

**[Learn more about these startups >](#)**

Topeka looks forward to working with the growing Plug and Play Topeka team to introduce the startups to resources Topeka and the region can offer to facilitate success of the program, startups and corporate partners.

## STR'S DESTINATION REPORT/TRAVEL STATS

Hotel statistics as reported in STR's Destination Report have remained predictably low as Topeka approaches the 1-year anniversary of the COVID-19 shutdowns. February room demand was down about 18.4 percent from 2020 - a slight decrease from January. With the opening of the new SpringHill Suites, room supply increased by 2,380 rooms compared to 2020. This has helped to drive down our occupancy rate which was down more than 10 percentage points for the month (38.92% vs 2020. Average Daily Rate (ADR) showed a slight increase from January but remains historically low. ADR for February was an estimated \$70.64 (down from \$83.10 in 2020) placing monthly hotel revenue at an estimated \$2,098,423 (down just over 30 percent from 2020).

## NEW GO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Ashley Lehman started as GO Topeka's Business Development Manager on March 15. She previously worked in the Resource Development Department of the Greater Topeka Partnership under as the Resource Development Manager.

In her new position, Ashley will focus on substantive results by creating innovative programs that assist in making Topeka and Shawnee a prime location for businesses to grow and thrive. Additionally, she will develop quality relationship with local employers and site consultants and work to help establish GO Topeka as a leading economic development organization in the nation.

## FORGE COLLABS WITH WMBD FOR WOMEN'S FORUM

Forge was pleased to partner with the Women & Minority Business Development program for a Spring Women's Forum: Young Professional - Forging Your Path. Attendees heard from a panel of local women leaders about what it's like being a female in a leadership position, challenges in the workplace, and their journey to their careers.

The panel included: LeTiffany Obozele, Chief of Prosecution, City of Topeka; Fatima Luthi, Branch Manager, Envista Credit Union; Aliison Sedore, Director of Administration, Bureau Chief of Human Resources, KDOT; Elizabeth Ellrich, Chiropractor/Owner, Sunflower Chiropractic. The forum was moderated by the Forge Young Talent Chair, Del-Metrius Herron.

The free virtual event was held on March 25.

## TOPEKA YOUTH COMMISSION

This month, the Topeka Youth Commission started a new year with new members! At its monthly meeting, the commission inducted all its recruits. The group is very excited for this year and everything each of its 39 volunteer leaders have to offer.

Each committee is very busy and hard at work organizing all of their projects and events for the year.

## FORGE 'ASK AN EXPERT' SERIES DEBUTS

The Business Development & Entrepreneurship Herd hosted Episode 1 of their "Ask the Expert" Series on March 30 via Zoom. Attendees connected with Martha Bartlett Piland. Martha is an author, inventor, speaker, innovator, and local marketing expert.

The 2021 Ask the Expert Series promises to:

- Connect young professionals and small business owners to a local marketing expert.
- Focus on different facets of marketing tactics most commonly used by local small businesses.
- Teach best practices from local expert around marketing.
- Develop simple and straight-forward strategies and/or goals that young professionals can put in place for their business or field.

## BUSINESS ATTRACTION

GO Topeka has observed a steady flow of companies looking at locating in Shawnee County. The majority of them are in manufacturing.

In terms of site selection priorities, the availability of sites and buildings along with all things related to workforce continue to drive site location factors.

Site Selectors' Most Important Criteria:

1. Workforce skills
2. Workforce development
3. Transportation infrastructure
4. Ease of permitting and regulator procedures
5. State and local tax scheme
6. Right-to-work state
7. Utilities (Cost, reliability)
8. Quality of Life
9. Incentives
10. Legal Climate (tort reform)

## PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

Be sure to think of doing business with our members first!

Please welcome our new members who joined in February:

**Bling Bling Yard Cards**

**Lean Kitchen Company**

**Peterson Publication**

Thank you to the following our February renewal memberships. [See full list >](#)

## BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

While GO Topeka staff continues to pursue and progress its Business Retention & Expansion projects currently in the pipeline, there are already have been nine joint BR&E visits conducted in March.

## VISIT TOPEKA MARKETING UPDATE

Visit Topeka has been awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Kansas Tourism Office in support of the new “Thunder Over the Heartland” event.

Brown V. Board is featured in the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Guide as a Kansas Tourism ad by way of a partnership with the Kansas Tourism Office. You can view it at [https://issuu.com/grouptravelleaderinc/docs/civilrightsguide\\_2021/16](https://issuu.com/grouptravelleaderinc/docs/civilrightsguide_2021/16) on page 57.

Visit Topeka’s search engine marketing (SEM) continues to beat the industry average at a click-through-rate of 7.27% on Google, whereas the industry average is 4.68%.

## TOTAL RESOURCE CAMPAIGN

The Partnership is happy to announce its 2022 Total Resource Campaign Chair is Martha Bartlett Piland of MB Piland Advertising + Marketing! Martha will be leading our amazing captains and volunteers for a third year. The Partnership is excited to have her leadership and expertise to lead our campaign for another year.

## GROUP TOUR BOOKINGS ARE HEATING UP

Visit Topeka's pipeline is steadily filling and holding strong with six total leads in group sales for an economic impact of \$18,00 in our community.

Spring is attempting to make its grand entrance and it's stirring up meeting and tour planners with interest in Topeka. March has brought quite a bit of activity with four definite tour group bookings for 2021 and additional pending trips. Visit Topeka staff helped them create diverse and intriguing itineraries, such as a Foodie Tour, Tulip Time sights, and a Mystery Tour complete with shopping, tasting, and a sneak peek of a historic downtown building currently under renovation. The opportunities are endless when it comes to group activities.

## TOP CITY INTERN PLANNING UNDERWAY

Each summer, Topeka's Top City Interns welcomes more than 200 interns from major employers all over the community. The program introduces students to the city and local business leaders. It's a chance to meet other interns and make the most of their time in Topeka.

The Top City Interns Committee is currently planning for the 2021 summer session, while taking into consideration new COVID-19 protocols and the utility of virtual meets. Additional details are forthcoming.

## SPORTS SALES IN SLOW BUT STEADY RECOVERY

A slow recovery has started and Visit Topeka Sports Sales is seeing an uptick of calendared events and renewed optimism for the spring and summer. During the month, we had turned definite nine different events representing \$570,000 with almost 1,000 room nights. While positive news with phone calls is coming in, it seems like the next months and those thereafter will be even better.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 is still a factor for sports planning and three separate events were cancelled, the largest being Kansas Kids Wrestling which was held at the Kansas Star Casino instead of the tournament's home for over thirty years. These three events represented over \$3M in economic impact to our city; however, we look forward to welcoming all of these cancelled events back to our city in 2022.



## CONVENTION SALES

Visit Topeka's convention sales pipeline currently holds 26 leads for almost 16,000 room nights with an economic impact of \$5.7 million for Topeka. There were two pieces of business that were dropped from the pipeline, one being a national bird show and another being a state association piece of business; however, 4 conventions were won during the month of March that will bring 1,200 attendees to Topeka over the next 3 years. Our team is looking forward to the increase of interest and bookings for Topeka and continuing to make a positive impact on business for our hotel and attraction partners.

## PARTNERSHIP EVENTS ARE REVVING UP

Events are revving up again and we are here for it! Business Unwind is back on April 20 at Cortez Transportation, 5-7 p.m.

On May 11, we will be celebrating our local economy at the Small Business Awards at Capitol Plaza. Thank you to our presenting sponsor Envista Credit Union.

Downtown After Hours will be resuming on May 13, hosted by Kansas Commercial Real Estate Services, Inc.

The Partnership welcomes you to join us for a drink or two at Tap That Topeka, the biggest beer fest in the Midwest, on June 12. Tickets can be purchased at [tick-ets](https://www.tick-ets.com). [topekapartnership.com](https://www.topekapartnership.com). The Second Saturday Concert Series will kick off that night as well at Celtic Fox.

Check out the [Topeka365.com](https://www.Topeka365.com) calendar to stay up to date on our events as well as the many others in our community.

## RESTAURANTEURS FIND RELIEF WITH AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

The American Rescue Plan Act has allotted \$23.6 billion to the Small Business Administration to make tax-free grants to restauranteurs that have endured losses during the pandemic. The eligible companies will include the following: Food trucks, food stands, food carts, caterers, saloons, inns, taverns, bars, lounges, brewpubs, taprooms, tasting rooms and restaurants.

Grants are based on the difference between your 2019 and 2020 gross revenues. The total grant amount for an eligible business and any affiliated business is capped at \$10M and is limited to \$5M per physical location of the business. Contact Glenda Washington at [glenda.washington@topekapartnership.com](mailto:glenda.washington@topekapartnership.com) for more information.

# SHAWNEE COUNTY RETAIL SALES

The U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Commerce reported that in February 2021, retail sales dropped by 3% compared to the previous month to \$561.7 billion, but at the same time, this is 6.3% higher than a year ago (February 2020). This drop follows a significant surge in retail spending in January 2021, where total retail spending was estimated to be \$579.1 billion, 7.6 percent higher than December 2020.

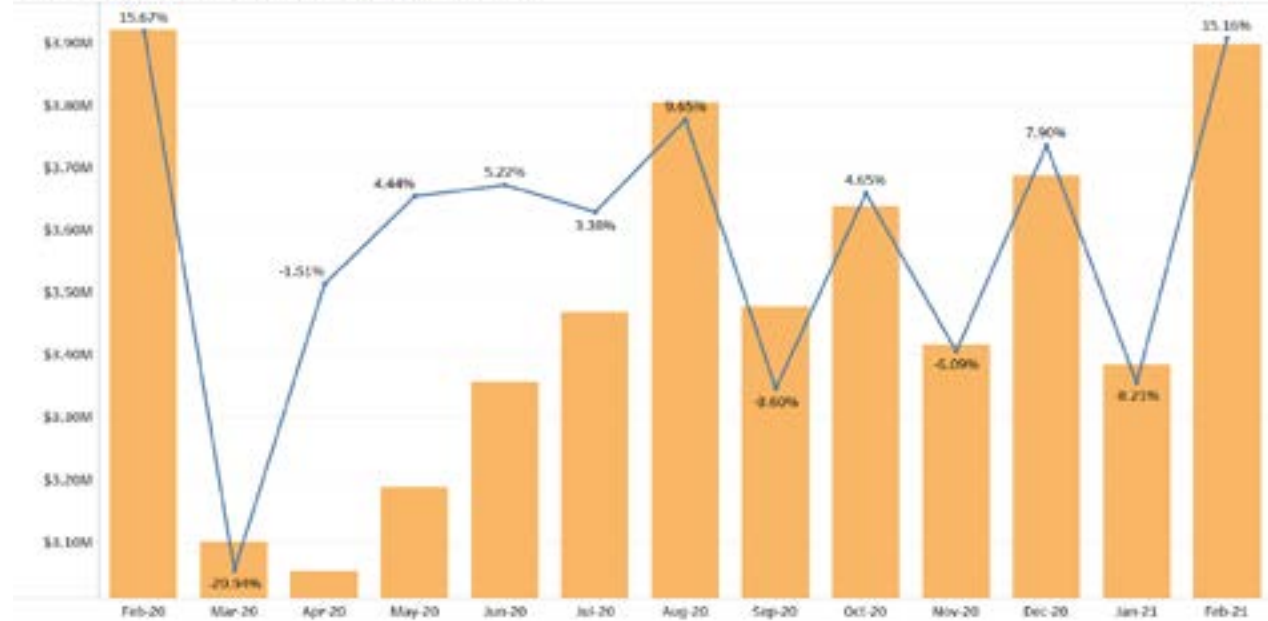
Although there was a decrease in the latest month over month retail spending, it is arguably expected after a large surge. When we looked at the year over year change in retail spending, we can see that the spending in February 2021 was well above pre-pandemic levels. The latest stimulus checks and the increase in vaccinations could have a positive impact on the future of retail spending.

Local retail spending also showed some positive signs this past year when many expected a grim year for retail sales. Data from the Kansas Department of Revenue shows that sales and use tax

distributions to the county were 5% greater overall in 2020 compared to 2019, thanks in part to online sales, drastic changes in consumer spending and financial support from the government. Unfortunately, many small local retail shops saw a drastic decrease in sales, and many of them had to make some difficult decisions due to the pandemic.

This past round of stimulus checks is expected to create a large boost in consumer spending.

Sales Tax and Use Tax Distribution in Shawnee County



Data: Kansas Department of Revenue

Graph Legend  
Sales & Use Tax Distribution  
Month Percent Change

## LEADERSHIP GREATER TOPEKA EVENTS UPDATE

### Engaging Leaders: - Dr. Walt Menninger, MD

Calling LGT Alumni! Join us for this virtual event on Thursday, April 8, 4 - 5 p.m. Our special guest is Dr. Walt Menninger, MD. He is the third generation of Menningers to lead in the research, study, and treatment guiding people to mental health. Dr. Walt also served as CEO for the Menninger Clinic from 1993 to 2001.

**Register now >**

### 2020 Graduation

The Leadership Greater Topeka class of 2020 graduation has been delayed due to the pandemic. We are scheduled to finally celebrate, so SAVE THE DATE: May 12, 2021 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Evergy Plaza, Entertainment by The Serrano Peppers. Registration coming soon.

## KS PTAC YEARLY GOALS UPDATE

Fiscal Year 2021 began Feb 1, 2021. Below you will see an update on the progress made toward FY21 goals.

**NEW CLIENTS** - Guided 18 new small businesses through the process of becoming registered to do businesses with the federal government.

**COUNSELING** - Held 142 hours of one-on-one counseling sessions with existing and new small businesses.

**EVENTS** – Held two training events. The topic covered included an “Introduction to Government Contracting.” This was held virtually and hosted by JCCC.

Upcoming Training Events register to attend here: <https://www.wichita.edu/research/kansasptac/ptacevents.php>

**VALUE** - Assisted KS PTAC clients across the state with obtaining Federal Contract Awards worth \$2.9 million. These contracts have been awarded between 2/1/21 – 3/26/21.

If interested please register to work with KS PTAC at [www.KansasPTAC.org](http://www.KansasPTAC.org).

## MOMENTUM 2022: IMPLEMENTING TOPEKA'S BIKEWAYS PEDESTRIAN PLAN

The City and County together received over \$2M in bikeways/trails awards from the State of Kansas last month. This includes completing the Shunga/Deer Creek Trail all the way to Lake Shawnee, completing (with City street projects as well) the Landon Trail connections to and through Downtown, converting half of the Kansas Avenue bridge over the River to fully protect cyclists and pedestrians, the start of our levee trail system on the north side of the River, and a wide side-path along North Tyler that will take people substantially up to Highway 24 and the Soldier Creek Trail. Congratulations to the Complete Streets Advisory Committee, citizens, City and County staff and elected officials on this effort.

## GO TOPEKA PARTNERS WITH DOC ON AVIATION PROJECTS

GO Topeka currently has two active aviation projects originating from a new strategic partnership with the Department of Commerce. Staff has attended an offsite meeting with one prospect in mid-March and are planning a Topeka visit with the company in the coming weeks.

## THE BRITE CENTER DIRECTOR VISITED THE WMBD COUNCIL

Laurie Piper, director of the Washburn University BRITE Center, shared the various goal of the Center with the Women & Minority Business Development Council this month. The focus was primarily on import/export, connection to special resources, and selling a product or service nationally and internationally. These aspects assist clients with identifying alternate financing and project funding.



## SENATORS OLSEN AND O'SHEA VISIT SMALL BUSINESS COUNCIL

The Small Business Council hosted State Senators Olsen and O'Shea at the monthly Council meeting. The senators provided a legislative update and informed the Council of the Bills that they worked on this session. Senator Olsen shared that housing would be one of the key priorities in the next session. He also mentioned, as Chair of the Commerce Committee, he would be working on fortifying the State's toolbox and looking at the tools that other states employ to attract and retain businesses to see if they can be duplicated in Kansas.

## CHOOSE TOPEKA IMPORTANT DATA

To date the Choose Topeka talent recruitment initiative has collected:

- 5,800 general submissions of interest
- Over 300 remote worker submissions
- 25 employer candidate submissions

This month, Choose Topeka received 13 pieces of earned media.

## 2021 VISITORS GUIDE AVAILABLE SOON

Visit Topeka has completed the 2021 Visitors Guide and it has gone to print. Once printed and shipped, the guide will be distributed by distribution partners, as well as in partnership with TARC services here in Topeka. A Spanish translation is being completed in partnership with the Greater Topeka Partnership's Equity and Opportunity Officer, Glenda Washington, by a local Topekan, and will supplement the guide online at [VisitaTopeka.com](http://VisitaTopeka.com). All guide content is currently being added to [VisitTopeka.com](http://VisitTopeka.com) as well, and will help enhance user experience, search engine optimization, and allow for paid promotion and advertising to begin.

## MOMENTUM WELCOMES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STRATEGY

In preparation for the next five-year strategy, consultant research is being conducted. Momentum welcomes recommendations from businesses and individual who have worked with community development talent specific to strategic planning efforts. You may direct your recommendation or questions to **[Michelle Stubblefield@topekapartnership.com](mailto:Michelle.Stubblefield@topekapartnership.com)**.

# SHAWNEE COUNTY'S LABOR MARKET

The Kansas Department of Labor reported the first labor statistics data of the year. As of January 2021, Shawnee County had a 6.8% unemployment rate; this represents a significant increase of more than 2.5 percentage points from the previous month (December 2020), where the unemployment rate in the county was 4.1%.

In total, there are 6,430 people out of work in the county; this means that almost twice as many people were out of work from both the previous month (December 2020) and the previous year (January 2020). At the same time, the labor force, the pool of available workers, increased by almost 4,000 workers from the previous month. The number of employed workers in the county is at 88,094, which is 1,260 larger than the previous month, and historically high for a January.

Overall, we are seeing that while the number of unemployed local workers increased, the pool of available labor and the number of employed workers is increasing. The local labor market remains in a challenging time, but there are many signs that leads to us to believe that improvements are coming.

| Local Area Unemployment Statistics |                   |        |       |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|-------|
| Region                             | Unemployment Rate |        |       |
|                                    | Jan-21            | Jan-20 | YoY Δ |
| Shawnee County                     | 6.80%             | 3.70%  | 3.10% |
| Kansas                             | 5.40%             | 3.30%  | 2.10% |
| USA                                | 6.80%             | 4.00%  | 2.80% |

## FINANCIAL RESULTS

February Private Results: Net Income came in just slightly better than budget. Revenues and Expenses are both under performing budget due to the postponement of our 2021 Annual Meeting to July.

February Visit Topeka Results: TGT Revenue continues to out preform our conservative 2021 budget. VTI is cautiously optimistic about the remainder of the year.

February GO Topeka Results: COVID has continued to cause some slowness in getting a couple of programs off the ground for GO Topeka resulting is lower expenses to budget.

With the end Q1 just around the corner, the Finance team will be working with budget owners to recast end of year projections.

## KDHE LABORATORY

Discussions around the fate of the aging Docking State Office Building have been ongoing for years. Governor Kelly had proposed several options for rehabilitating portions of the building and incorporating the KDHE Labs (currently also aging at Forbes Field). Both DTI and the Chamber have expressed support for any plan that revitalizes the corner of 10th & Topeka and brings good jobs to downtown. In mid-March, the Legislature's Joint State Building Committee met and, surprisingly, recommended that other Kansas communities be invited to step forward and make bids to relocate the labs and its aprx. 80 jobs outside of Topeka.

The Chamber has mobilized quickly to alert the Shawnee County delegation and legislative leadership of their strong opposition to this. This plan would set a precedent pitting Kansas communities against one another when they should be competing to attract more assets TO the state. This outcome could make the so-called "Border Wars" in Kansas City seem genteel by comparison. The KDHE lab belongs in Topeka. Moving it risks losing many of the experienced scientists who work there now but have voiced their opposition to being forced to move. They may pursue their careers elsewhere, shrinking Kansas' already constricted supply of scientific talent.

## LUNCHEON WITH SENATOR MORAN

Several staff and volunteer leaders from the Partnership attended a luncheon for U.S. Senator Jerry Moran on March 29. The intimate event was sponsored by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and provided local leaders an opportunity to hear from the Senator about current goings-on in Washington and to share their own priorities for Topeka. The group discussed the promise of the animal health corridor, the importance of keeping the Polk Quincy Viaduct project moving forward and plans to further diversify Topeka's economy.

## FEDERAL COMMUNITY PROJECT FUNDS

Community Project Funds are a new version of what used to be called “Earmarks.” Each Member of Congress may submit up to 10 requests for funding for projects in their districts. The Chamber has convened various stakeholders to coalesce around a short list of priorities eligible for this type of federal funding. On March 29, the Chamber led a discussion of all Partnership chairs and identified two key priorities: funding for a portion of the Polk Quincy Viaduct and the Innovation Campus. The team will now refine these asks and present them to Congressman LaTurner by early-April. Other worthy project ideas will also be discussed to raise LaTurner’s awareness of them and, perhaps, put them in the pipeline for future asks.

## AUDIT

Each year the Partnership undergoes three different financial audits. The finance team continues to pull together everything our audit partners require to conduct those audits. The 2020 audits officially start at the end of March and the auditors will be on-site off and on throughout the month of April conducting field work.

## U.S. CHAMBER ACCREDITATION

Partnership staff has been working for months to complete the 9-part application to achieve prestigious Accreditation from the United States Chamber of Commerce. The application covers such matters as governance, finance, government affairs, human resources, program development, technology and communications. Accreditation represents the United States Chamber’s seal of approval that our organization among the select group of chambers which adhere to best practices in organizational management. The application process alone has already netted several tangible process improvements at the Partnership. For example, existing plans for responding to emergencies have been compiled into a single easy to reference manual, as have the Partnership’s various financial policies and the Chamber Board is adopting a documented process to periodically evaluate its own effectiveness as a body and discuss ways to continuously improve.