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**CORONAVIRUS PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR CITIES
CIRCULAR No. 6**

GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS: RE-OPENING THE CITIES

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Governor Parson has announced what he is calling ***Show Me Strong Recovery Plan***, which consists of four “pillars” (Parson 2020). Beyond identifying these four pillars, there are not yet any details on the plan. The Governor has indicated that there will be two phases to the plan and that not all counties will be on the same timeline. The Governor has also indicated that details of the plan are expected to be announced the week of April 27 – May 1, with an expected implementation date of May 4. Any plan developed by cities would likely need to interface with the statewide plan. Even if cities or counties repeal their stay-at-home orders, the statewide order will remain in effect; however, the statewide order is very different from most local orders.

Planning for re-opening

Cities will need to consider a number of obstacles on the road to recovery. These assume that although the virus is no longer an immediate threat, without preventative measures it could easily re-emerge. Each city needs to determine its own approach to re-opening. It is best to use data from the local health department – is there a high number of COVID-19 cases? Are there areas within the city that are more at risk? What type of facilities does the city have that may encourage gatherings of a large number of people (e.g., parks, stadium, airport, etc.).

Each city will need to look at its current emergency status. If the city has an emergency declaration in effect it may need to be extended, even if in a revised form. This may require council/board action to do so. An amended emergency declaration is likely the best way to



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implement the phases to reopening the city. Does the city have an Emergency Operations Plan? If so, consider any procedures that may apply to “re-opening.” Instead of a mayoral declaration, a temporary ordinance may be more appropriate for some cities. Many cities implemented utility relief through emergency declarations; if so, should that program be continued, and if so how?

Consider a phased approach to re-opening, by either following the Governor’s 2-phase approach or other places in the country that are using a 3-phase approach, for example:

Phase 1 – continue social distancing, limit the number of people who can gather to 10, prohibit organized sports, allow restaurants, bars, gyms to open as long as they meet the social distancing requirements, encourage people to telework if they can, encourage people who are most vulnerable to continue staying home, etc.

Phase 2 – increase the number of people allowed to gather (e.g., 50 people), continue encouraging people to telework if able, continuing to encourage people who are most vulnerable to continue staying home, etc.

Phase 3 – unrestricted gatherings, people back to work, etc.

As cities prepare their plan they will need to review large city assets and consider how to make them function during the continued threat period, and even to avoid future threats. Large scale assets would include such features as airports, transit systems, stadiums, theaters, convention centers, and similar infrastructure. How will social distancing be addressed within these facilities?

Cities will need to determine what precautions are needed to allow businesses to reopen, and some cities may wish to establish their own standards; however, it will be less confusing to the public, and thereby gain greater compliance, if all facilities have similar rules. These provisions might include such things as limiting seating, requiring masks, painting lines to separate people waiting in line, or mandating cleaning standards. We will be providing examples of social distancing rules for re-opened cities on our website.



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Protecting employees is also vital. As businesses re-open employees will still need personal protective equipment (“PPE”) such as masks and gloves. Unfortunately, these front-line workers are the least able to purchase these on their own, nor are small businesses likely to be able to obtain and/or afford adequate PPE for their employees; this could lead to further outbreaks, particularly among these workers. Cities can use their governmental resources to make PPE available to workers, and the State has created the Missouri PPE Marketplace to facilitate connecting healthcare facilities and PPE manufacturers.

Local governments also need to consider their own workers. Returning the community to full operation means returning local government to full operation. Among emergency response workers in Missouri, the use of PPE has sometimes been lax. Often PPE is only used when COVID-19 is suspected, rather than following the universal precautions that healthcare workers have adopted. Previous LML circulars discuss what techniques are available to cities to screen workers.

Planning for recovery

Merely unwinding the current restrictions is not likely to be enough. Special attention needs to be paid to food and retail establishments in the downtown areas; this is especially vital for small towns. Some current projections indicate that as many as 75% of small businesses may never re-open (Florida and Pedigo 2020). Cities will need to think creatively to help businesses avoid closure; this could include traditional economic development tools such as Community Improvement Districts, Chapter 353 Tax Abatement, or Tax Increment Financing. Cities should think about novel ways as well, such as loan programs, utility assistance, or other resources. LML can help advise on traditional economic development programs as well as more innovative ideas.



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Cities should also consider supporting the creative economy (Florida and Pedigo 2020). Theaters, art centers and stores, music venues, and similar businesses, as well as the artists that fuel them, are what give a community its unique appeal. Cities that can preserve what they currently have in these areas will have an advantage in economic development when this crisis ends.

Sources:

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