



# NIBS COVID-19 Town Hall: The Future of Design & Construction

## June 29, 2020 | Session Overview

### MODERATOR

**Katharine E. Morgan**, President, ASTM International

### PANEL

**Darrell X. Rounds**, Operations Group Manager, Community Operations, General Motors

**Mindy W. Saffer**, LEED AP, Managing Principal, Cresa

**Jennifer Kolstad**, Global Design Director, Ford Motor Company

**J. Kevin Heinly**, AIA, LEED AP, Managing Director & Principal, Gensler

**Dr. Alisha Wilkins**, Owner/Founder, Hera Hub Temecula

## COVID-19 VIRTUAL TOWN HALL: FUTURE OF DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION OVERVIEW

On June 29, 2020, the National Institute of Building Sciences held its third in a series of COVID-19 virtual town halls, brought to you by the NIBS Consultative Council. The town hall received more than 800 registrants from throughout the building industry, universities, officials representing the federal, local, and state governments and more.

During this town hall, we learned what small and large companies are doing to prepare for building reoccupation by workers, from revisiting floor plans and workspace footprints to securing adequate PPE and supplies to maintain health and wellness at the office.

The panel also covered staging and population structuring, signage, touchless technology, and the probability of at least some level of continued telecommuting.

“Our new normal keeps safety and health at the forefront as we build for the future,” says NIBS President & CEO Lakisha A. Woods.

A fourth town hall is being planned. Details will be shared on [www.nibs.org](http://www.nibs.org).

## ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF SAFETY DURING UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

Managing a single structure – or even a portfolio of buildings – poses different challenges.

To establish a culture of wellness and safety, there must be a methodology to reopening. And every department needs to have a hand in the process, including human resources, public policy, legal, facilities management, maintenance, and the executive team.

It may have any or all of the following:

- An entry protocol with health questionnaire
- Distribution of personal protective equipment and masks
- Availability of strategically-placed hand sanitizer machines
- Temperature-screening process
- Ample signage and floor markings
- Touchless technology in public spaces or in bathrooms
- Stockpile of critical supplies, including hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes, surgical masks, and toilet paper

### GENERAL MOTORS: FROM MAKING CORVETTES TO VENTILATORS

The tenant population of the GM Renaissance Center in Detroit dropped by 90 percent as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Renaissance Center is owned by General Motors as its world headquarters.

By mid-March, GM had to act quickly – agility and nimbleness were critical to the establishment of a system where employees felt safe and were safe.

Building footprints, especially for a high rise, is significant. Before, a company may have had 100 employees working on a floor; today, that number may need to be around 60, when you consider social distancing protocols.

Ultimately, the spread of COVID-19 will come down to items like face coverings, PPE, and good hygiene.

Regarding facility management, housekeepers, or “community keepers” as they’re referred to at the Renaissance Center, are seen very often throughout the day.

GM also created a playbook around its risk mitigation strategy to the pandemic. This playbook includes mandatory training that employees must take prior to returning to a physical jobsite that highlights what’s required and what will be expected.

Site references:

- General Motors COVID-19 Safety Playbook: <https://gmauthority.com/blog/2020/05/heres-whats-in-general-motors-covid-19-safety-playbook/>
- GM Coronavirus (COVID-19) Updates and Information: <https://www.gm.com/coronavirus.html>

### IMPLEMENTING A LONG-TERM WORK POLICY

Commercial real estate company Cresa is doing many things to help project and facility managers, facilitating discussions between clients and building owners.

Data pulled from a tenant survey of CoreNet Global’s worldwide members, dated April 2020, found that 84 percent were planning a phased return to the workplace. Seventy-eight

percent planned to look to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention for guidance on reentry timelines. Finally, 49 percent stated that remote work will remain an option.

Cresa immediately created a remote work task force to help clients figure out a robust work policy that would work long term.

The company is working with clients to build floor plans for the return to office, identifying 6-foot distancing parameters, locations of sanitization and temperature control stations. Cresa develops long-term real estate strategies that incorporate remote work policies to reduce the office footprint and short-term strategies like rent deferrals or abatements.

Regarding remote work, technology is readily available and can be trusted to allow employees to properly work. Allowing flexibility and remote work is a culture in itself – it’s a culture of trust and accountability.

From a real estate standpoint, remote work can serve as a tool to help reduce real estate costs.

Site reference:

- Cresa COVID-19 Response: <https://www.cresa.com/Blog/Cresa-COVID-19-Response-Our-Commitment-to-Supporting-Your-Organization>

### COMPARTMENTALIZING ISSUES INTO NOW, NEAR AND FAR PROBLEMS

Ford Motor Company currently is operating similarly to other companies, with regard to reopening its doors. Everything is lined up, from paperwork to temperature checks, PPE, and social distancing.

Problems that are near and far – those that may present themselves down the road when there may or may not be a vaccine – are much harder to answer or predict.

Ford now is in the schematic design phase of its new world headquarters. Its experts are looking at everything, from sound science to research. But today’s pandemic culture is bringing forth a lot of questions: Will people ever want to sit in cubicles? Will employees want to sit six feet apart in a collaborative setting?

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At this point, company officials are not yet leaping into any design conclusions or furniture or real estate solutions. That will all sort itself out when it's time.

The most important thing is to protect its workers and community. A factory shutting down comes with a catastrophic trickle effect, knocking down the community, state, and local economy.

Site reference:

- Ford Coronavirus – Latest Updates: <https://corporate.ford.com/coronavirus.html>

## BUILDING STRATEGIES MUST BE ADAPTED

The public is constantly finding out new things about the coronavirus. As such, building strategies must be adapted to focus on facts.

There's no such thing as a viral-proof building, but things can be put into place to encourage occupant wellness and health.

Architecture, planning and design firm Gensler has 50 offices, occupying one million square feet.

A work-from-home survey has found that changing behaviors as a result of the coronavirus will impact the future of the workplace.

Half of the 2,300 surveyed now desire a hybrid workplace – something that allows for focused work to take place at home and allows employees to drop into the office a couple of days a week.

Gensler currently is modifying offices that are in design and construction. Among the considerations: smart building data and tools, touchless technology, visitor lounges to control visitor access, and hybrid building strategies – buildings with portions that are natural ventilated or collaboration spaces with their own ventilation.

Air ventilation is critically important, and Gensler mentioned a three-pronged strategy: Dilute the virus with more air changes (.15 cfm/sq feet is a recommended amount of outside air), trap it with filtration, and kill the virus with UV lighting in the ductwork or ionization.

Site references:

- Gensler – 10 Considerations for Transitioning Back to Work in a Post-COVID-19 World: <https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/blog/10-considerations-for-transitioning-back-to-work-in-a-post>
- Gensler – Designing Government Offices for the Post-COVID Era: <https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/blog/designing-government-offices-for-the-post-covid-era>

## THERE'S STILL A FUTURE FOR COWORKING

Coworking company Hera Hub has eight locations across the nation. It caters mostly to women-owned businesses.

Among the protocols of returning to work, members of the community must agree to wear face coverings or masks. This includes people entering a Hera Hub location, for example, for mail delivery.

Additional signage is clear, including information on access to mental health care services. There's also a sign-in sheet for specific spaces, and users must clean and sign out of specific areas when they leave.

One of the benefits to coworking – the furniture, space, and IT already are in place.

Site reference:

- Hera Hub – Keeping You Safe Through COVID: <https://herahub.com/mission-valley/covid>

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