

June 10, 2020

MEMO TO: Traci N. T. Fujita, Director  
Office of Council Services

F R O M: Shelly Espeleta, Legislative Analyst *see*

SUBJECT: **WEBINAR: “PREPARING TO REOPEN AMERICA’S COUNTIES”**  
(PAF 20-148)

On May 27, 2020, I participated in a webinar entitled “Preparing to Reopen America’s Counties” hosted by National Association of Counties (NACo). The webinar was the first in a series of virtual town halls to discuss the reopening of America’s counties and provide examples of how county leaders can safely transition local communities and county workforces to a “new normal” in light of COVID-19.

The webinar was led by the Honorable Larry Johnson, NACo Second Vice President and Commissioner, DeKalb County, Georgia, and featured the following presenters: Honorable Debra Lucero, Supervisor, Butte County, California; Brian Abernathy, Managing Director, Philadelphia County and City of Pennsylvania; and Joe Judge, Executive Managing Director representing JLL (Jones Lang LaSalle Incorporated), a real estate services firm and NACo Partner with experience in working with county governments, located in Chicago, Illinois.

### **Butte County, California**

Supervisor Lucero opened up the discussion and provided information on Butte County’s reopening process. Butte County is currently following all enactments put in place by Governor Newsom and is one of the first counties in their state to reopen. The County has established sector teams in Health, Government, Education, and Faith-based and is working to implement specific measures for businesses before reopening. A checklist has been developed and is available on the County’s website to ensure businesses meet all guidelines prior to opening their doors to the public. For example, businesses such as barbershops and salons must use a log to list all clients who come in for an appointment, including the names of all employees the clients had close contact with, for mandatory follow ups.

Several programs have been implemented in response to COVID-19 including a FEMA-funded food-delivery service with qualifications set by income guidelines, a phone line for the general public dedicated to COVID-related questions, and a dedicated email process for elected officials to submit questions and share responses to COVID-related scenarios, modeling what has worked for Solano County. Regular public updates are being made through a dedicated website <https://buttecounty.net/publichealth/buttereopens> that shares information provided by local work groups, health professionals, and the State. Weekly calls and meetings with other California counties and social media such as You Tube and Facebook are also being used.

The wearing of masks is not mandated, but highly encouraged. Larger businesses like Costco and Trader Joe's are requiring patrons to use masks before entering their stores. The County is relying heavily on the business community to voluntarily comply with established guidelines. Should complaints arise, a compliance team has been established to investigate the situation on a case-by-case basis.

Mass gatherings are still disallowed by the Governor's order; however, the County has still received reports of large social gatherings, particularly during the recent Memorial Day weekend, where many individuals were seen without masks. The County is monitoring the situation and remains concerned that an increase in the number of positive cases may result if this practice continues.

Supervisor Lucero said reopening Butte County has gone fairly well; however, businesses have not experienced much traffic as individuals are still understandably cautious.

### **Philadelphia County and City of Pennsylvania**

Managing Director Abernathy reported 22,000 positive cases currently. The death rate peaked in mid-April for a total of 1,300 deaths due to COVID-19, but the number of fatalities are continuing to decline. Over 50 percent of deaths have occurred in nursing homes.

Several community response programs have been developed such as a non-congregational shelter system, distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE), meals distribution, and a facilitated transportation system.

As they look to reopening, the City and County plan to work in partnership with at least five neighboring counties to establish shared regional guidelines before the June 5 reopening date set by the Governor.

Three key core principles they intend to focus on are:

- Containment—including case identification, case isolation, contact tracing, and contact quarantine.
- Protecting the vulnerable populations—including those in nursing homes, jails, and shelters; providing PPE to staff and residents; and establishing restrictions on visitors and residents leaving these facilities.
- Social distancing—requiring face coverings while in public, encouraging remote work where possible, staying home when sick, maintaining good personal hygiene, observing six feet physical distance, and providing regular sanitation and appropriate signage.

There are certain considerations being made for a tiered reopening to include reducing the number of people in certain settings, reducing crowd sizes, reducing the duration of face-to-face interaction, minimizing confined interior spaces, and installing barriers to prevent transmission.

The City and County has adopted the Governor's color-coded system, with modifications, which details the different phases for reopening businesses and activities. Red means stay at home, or high risk, and covers life-sustaining businesses and activities such as health care, pharmacies, grocery stores, restaurants (carryout and delivery only), construction and repair-type businesses, and core transportation services. Yellow, or lower risk, covers businesses and activities slated to reopen on June 5 such as retail businesses (with restrictions; curbside and delivery strongly encouraged), childcare centers, outdoor youth day camps and recreation, outdoor parks-related amenities, and office-based businesses (telework whenever feasible).

The City and County has modified the system to add two additional risk categories. Significant concerns remain with businesses and activities coded as green, or medium risk, which covers small social and religious gatherings; outdoor group recreational activities (adults); schools; personal services such as salons, barbers, and spas; gym and indoor exercise classes; and restaurants (dine-in, with limited occupancy and other restrictions). White, or higher risk, includes businesses and activities such as restaurants (with no occupancy

limits); conventions and conferences; large social and religious gatherings; large sporting events, concerts, and movies; and senior services. Businesses and activities labeled as high risk will reopen later than all other risk categories.

## **JLL**

Executive Managing Director Judge spoke of shared insight and lessons learned that will be critical for counties to graduate to the next level of “normal.” There will be no “silver bullet” to reimagine one’s workspace, and each county will need to determine its comfort level to begin the reopening process.

Mr. Judge spoke of five top solutions that will make the return-to-work process smoother for counties:

- providing PPE to all employees,
- continuing to support telework,
- providing additional janitorial staff to maintain sanitation levels,
- providing flexibility with employees’ shifts, and
- conducting temperature scans.

As with any solutions prior to being implemented, available funding will be an issue.

Counties should not forget to implement strategies in the form of wellness plans and wellness rooms. In addition, counties should include a focus on employees’ psychological issues that may arise due to returning to the office.

Seven key areas to focus on in a workplace were discussed:

- employee and visitor screening,
- building and office operations,
- food and beverage,
- janitorial,
- employee health and wellness,
- space guidelines and adjustments, and
- mail services.

Several must-haves for reopening include:

- safety and sanitation stations,
- adequate circulation of office spaces and common areas,
- appropriate signage and communication,
- modification of workstations, and
- reduction of contact points such as faucets, filing cabinets, and coffee pots.

JLL conducted several informal participant surveys during the webinar. The first survey was to find out whether counties have a reopening strategy with return-to-work plans in place. A vast majority, 63 percent, have a plan in progress; 26 percent have a strategy to reopen; 11 percent have not yet begun to craft a plan.

Another survey centered on how people felt about returning to work in the office. The results were split, where one-third never wanted to return to the office, another one-third were anxious to go back, and the remaining one-third were somewhere in the middle. Despite this, it is generally understood that the productivity of a team is greater when employees are together and are able to collaborate. However, businesses must be mindful of the comfort level of employees on returning to the office and at the same time, preparing the office for employees to return.

In summary, there was no time for anyone to develop an adequate continuity plan after the COVID-pandemic hit. The process for reopening forces all of us to look at operational efficiencies, how we can do more with less, and how we can move forward in this new “normal.”

Thank you for allowing me to participate. Should you have any questions, please let me know.

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cc: Supervising Legislative Attorney