



REOPEN PUTNAM SAFELY TASK FORCE REPORT

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN

June 10, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo and County Executive Odell:

Enclosed, please find The Putnam County Business Council (PCBC) Reopen Putnam Safely and Economic Recovery Task Force's first list of needs and recommendations that we hope will assist in your individual reemergence plans.

The PCBC's Reopen Putnam Safely and Economic Recovery Task Force consists of business leaders from the private and public sectors. The Business Community/Not For Profit Sector and Municipal Leaders were asked for their input on key issues that their respective industries will need to address during the reemergence process. We have joined forces with the Business Council of Westchester (BCoW) to follow their lead on many of these guidelines and suggestions. A Big thank you to Marsha Gordon and John Ravitz of the BCoW for allowing us to adapt key components of their report, as well as providing support and mentorship to the PCBC Board.

It is important to note that many industries will be facing the same challenges as they look to ensure the safety of their employees and their clients. Equally important, the report includes recommendations that we hope your administration will find helpful.

As Putnam County begins its "reopening" Phase 2 process, the PCBC's Reopen Putnam Safely/Economic Recovery Task Force will continue to meet and look to identify strategies and systems that will assist businesses over these next few months. The PCBC will continue to provide both of your administrative teams with suggestions designed to facilitate your long-term plans.



JENNIFER MAHER
CHAIRWOMAN
PUTNAM COUNTY BUSINESS COUNCIL

ARTS

PARAMETERS, NOT GENERALIZATIONS

We question the grouping of all Arts & Cultural organizations into Phase 4, as some of these institutions do not bear the same level of risk to COVID-19 exposure. While it is understandable that large performing arts groups need and should be in Phase 4, there are many institutions that can and do function in smaller groups, such as art studios, small classes and administrative offices, which should be able to open in Phase 2. Also, cultural centers with large outdoor areas should be open for touring enjoyment.

RISK TOLERANCE

We all need to be responsible for doing our part in mitigating the spread of the virus. However, we will never be able to guarantee no-risk from infection of COVID, flu, car crashes, etc. It is important that lawmakers keep this crisis in context with the reality of other risks.

CATEGORIZATION

In addition to having guidelines specific to organizations of similar size, guidelines for our different lines of business would be extremely helpful. For example, many institutions contain a large theater with over 100 seats, but also have educational classes, camps, as well as offering small private rentals. Allowing these institutions to open under those circumstances would be helpful.

LIABILITY RISK TOLERANCE

In addition to concerns about employee claims, how do we protect against audience claims? Strong guidelines/requirements for patrons and or a harmless provision would help safeguard us. We need a liability plan. What do we need to do? What should it look like?

FUNDING

In addition to other funding opportunities for support through an extended closure, as the State starts to think about infrastructure support, we hope they'll think about capital support for arts organizations that may have to reconfigure to remain open, viable, and compliant.

NEEDS

- Who actually has the legal authority to interpret who should be open and who should not?
- Clear guidelines on health protocols required or recommended by businesses, as well as updates on social distancing guidelines.
- Easy access to masks and disinfectant.
- Guidelines on cleaning protocols and third-party hiring recommendations.
- Price breaks on some of the necessary services to allow Putnam to restart public operations while meeting the restrictions on capacity and cleanliness.
- Other funding opportunities, which will help us sustain operations while operating at reduced capacity -- since many of the available grants are either appropriately targeting individuals (gig workers, artists), or more focused on NYC.
- Portable restroom providers that handle BOH requirements for cleaning and disinfecting.



ENTERTAINMENT, HOSPITALITY AND TRANSPORTATION

- Liability Protections: This may be handled at the federal level as there are currently conversations happening around setting the standard of “gross negligence” for claims that could be made against companies by employees or customers.
- Access to adequate PPE equipment at a reasonable cost, as this will be a large expense added to company operations.
- Access to approved cleaning supplies.
- Clear and concise guidelines from regulators.
- Safe and reliable transportation for workforce.
- Safe and reliable childcare for children of employees.
- Flexibility from unions on existing job descriptions, roles and responsibilities as companies begin to open up and implement new health & safety protocols.
- Flexibility from unions as workforce members are brought back from furlough, but then may require time off, which will necessitate temporary returns of other employees from furlough.

NEEDS

- A reliable source of quality PPE. We utilize a large quantity of supplies due to the nature of our business.
- Higher quality N95 masks may also be necessary in the case where a customer is unknown to have active infection and service is absolutely necessary.

WANTS

- Protection from frivolous lawsuits. There needs to be legislation passed that reduces the likelihood of these suits.

WISHES

- Reduced or suspended fees. The taxi and limousine industry pays a TLC annual registration fee in NYC and Putnam County. The majority of their vehicles have been parked in lots and, therefore, have not generated any revenue for months.
- Permit expiration dates should be extended 6 months. The same should apply to restaurants and hotels that have to file for operating permits.



SPECIFIC TO HOSPITALITY

- Hospitality and tourism, among the hardest hit sectors of our economy, will continue to suffer from decreased demand even as a recovery begins. PPE should be offered at the same preferred pricing and accessibility as it is to all front-line workers via government mandates.
- Ease government cash expenses, such as taxes and fees, and ensure affordable access to capital will help hotels survive and position for recovery.
- Marketing will be a key success factor during the recovery. Additional funding and support to be administered by the County's designated and official tourism and marketing organization to overcome challenges.
- Standards to ensure the health and safety of our guests and employees must be clear, consistent and practical.
- The hospitality industry looks to the Legislature for protection from frivolous regulatory and legal action based, for example, on employee complaints that notice of furloughs and layoffs failed to meet advance notice or specific language requirements.

RESTAURANTS

- Maximum 6 guests per table with a set number of minimum feet between tables
- Hand Sanitizer dispensers places throughout for guests and staff to use All staff will wear masks
- Mobile payments, curbside, contact-free delivery is here to stay, which may mean more efficient and well-organized reservation systems.
- Single-use disposable paper menus, or laminated menus that are regularly sanitized. Or wall menus/chalkboards.
- Pre-packaged plastic utensils at the tables are a possibility.
- A required distance between bar seats.
- Prices should and will come down and some restaurants may change their entire menus to satisfy consumer needs.
- Glass dividers/partitions between tables as well as ultraviolet virus-killing machines at various dining room positions.
- More outdoor dining with simplified permitting process
- Staff training will be critical to maintaining these changes.
- Restaurant owners and chefs will continue to be inventive with meal kits, baked goods, family meals, interactive cooking demos, farm-crop boxes, etc.

GYMS

- To open in Phase 3 with 25% capacity then to Phase 4 with 50% Capacity.
- More outdoor training.
- Staff training will be critical to maintaining these changes.
- Hand Sanitizer dispensers placed throughout the establishment for guests and staff to use and sanitizing protocol for the entire facility.
- All staff will wear masks.



FINANCE

- Gauging the level of employee expectations regarding pre-entry health screens for workforce and customers.
- Plexiglas barriers at all work stations between employee and customers, as well as between employees and customers.
- Evaluating how to manage social distancing as that varies by location
- Whether or not masks will be required for employees and customers.
- We are identifying potential challenges with our team's ability to work full time due to childcare commitments, transportation, personal health concerns and other potential issues.



HEALTHCARE

Putnam County's healthcare sector has been on the front lines 24/7 since the pandemic hit our community. The Task Force will look to work closely with the leaders of our healthcare sector to assist them as they move forward with their work post COVID-19.

- Create and implement telehealth products.
- Provide health screening and temperature checks for patient, provider and staff safety.
- Expand clinical hours and increase patient-per-hour limits.
- Strictly follow all infection control practices, including frequent hand sanitization and hand washing. All workforce members asked to self-monitor by taking their temperature twice daily and assessing for COVID-19-like illness.
- Environmental services team members trained on cleaning all areas of buildings under current guidelines.
- Lobbies and many waiting areas/lounges closed. Ensure that common areas are not used for gathering.
- Practice socially distancing guidelines. Stand six-feet apart in medical offices and other healthcare facilities. Provide signage and decals denoting these distance protocols.

MUNICIPALITIES

- State to facilitate permitting and approvals. It is very difficult for municipalities to navigate the approval process with the State.
- Eliminate the NYS requirement to submit a new map to show where liquor is being served. Make it a simple application to the municipality that adheres to local rules and zoning.
- The required match on State grants is a challenging obstacle. These grants were awarded pre-COVID-19. At this point, the financial conditions of each municipality might preclude these capital projects from moving forward as we're unable to produce the required match.
- Waive required matches so that municipalities can proceed with the grant funds only and not hold back projects.
- Make sure that the State does not cut any funding to municipalities. It will be catastrophic.
- Expand decontamination services in all public facilities and community spaces, which require the appropriate equipment and supplies. Provide State funding or share service partnership.
- As a result of COVID-19 the need for adequate food supplies has increased significantly. Current resources (equipment, supplies, staffing and funding) are insufficient to meet the new demands.



NOT-FOR-PROFIT NEEDS



- Continue and increase access to telemedicine and remote service delivery across all health care/human services settings and all payers.
- Personnel costs are typically the largest expense for most NFP Businesses. Any plan to re-emerge must include protections for workers, including provision of adequate and appropriate PPE, job protections, sick leave, testing for return to work, safe working environments, etc.
- As state, county, and local budgets are being hit hard by COVID-19 responses, any plan to re-emerge should include strong consideration to continue existing contracts with NFPs.

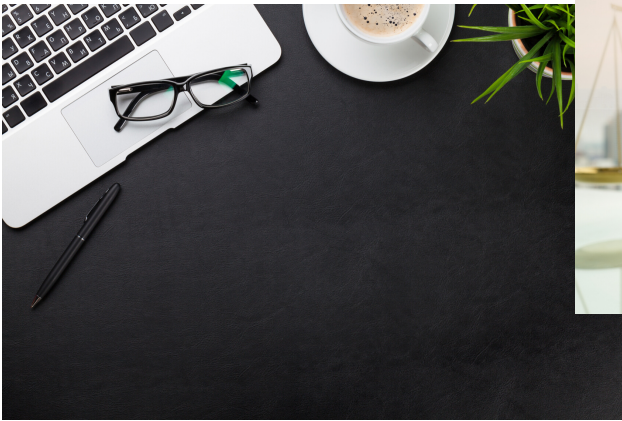
WANTS

- Many NFPs self-insure for unemployment. This is becoming a significant expense due to the high number of layoffs and furloughs. Further reimbursement for those who self-insure would provide significant financial relief.
- Develop a process for families and individuals who can't pay their rent to apply for state relief. Adding the burden of "rent forgiveness" entirely on landlords would further weaken the financial stability of both nonprofit and for-profit housing operators.

CHILDCARE



- Affordable, accessible and quality childcare is a critical component in providing a healthy and productive workforce. Childcare is unaffordable for nearly all low-and middle-income families in New York.
- Childcare businesses, unable to meet rising costs, are closing their doors in rising numbers.
- The PCBC will continue to urge the Governor and State Legislature on the importance of making a significant investment in childcare.



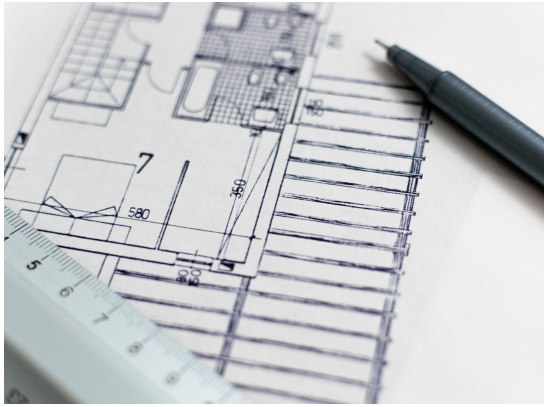
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

- The NYS mandates on precautions needed for employees to return to work must be clarified. Given that NYS is generally more employee friendly, how do we handle employees who refuse to be screened or who are opposed to leaving the workplace as they do not agree that they are symptomatic.
- Additionally, requirements, such as Plexiglas, thermos-screens, automated doors, and the like, are all expensive. NYS should provide support to businesses for the costs of compliance. Otherwise, these are essentially unfunded mandates.
- Supplies must be available and accessible. Items, such as hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, masks, gloves, and the like, are very difficult to find.
- Employer negligence needs to be waived for allowing employees to come back to work, or the contractor that goes into a house or on a job site.
- In law firms, attorneys have their own offices; paralegals and secretaries have separate work areas. Therefore, when businesses open up, they do not need to be at or below 50% workforce to maintain proper social distancing.
- Provide guidelines on building and court standards in the context of access (ingress, egress, and elevators), social distancing in common areas, increased cleaning and air recirculation.
- A major issue facing the legal industry is that a vast majority of staff have children. Without schools, day camps, or daycare reopening until Phase 4 of the Governor's plan, most businesses will be unable to fully open.
- Work Share Programs: The State should continue the Unemployment Work Share Program until schools, camps, and daycare centers are permitted to re-open.

REAL ESTATE BROKERAGE



- Tax credits to developers/owners who make capital expenditures for new construction and to owners/leaseholders of older properties who install modern HVAC in their buildings with improved air circulation in tenant spaces and other common areas in multi-tenanted buildings.
- Simplify/amend SEQRA to expedite approval processes and encourage developers who find State regulations too stringent to enter the market.
- Reopening schools, which are in Phase 4, may be appropriate to open sooner in some counties that are under control.
- Streamline cumbersome business licensing requirements and regulations that inhibit businesses from opening or operating in the State.
- Vital for real estate agents to be allowed to practice in person services with appropriate health and safety protocols and social distancing to minimize contact.
- Other issues of concern include gaining entry to municipal offices to access and file necessary documents to effect transactions.



REAL ESTATE CONSTRUCTION

NEEDS

- Level playing field for private construction. Private construction was shut down in March, but thousands of essential construction projects kept working safely with success.
- Reliable supply chains of PPE suitable for construction.
- Level playing field in terms of safety protocols.
- Expectations of timely responses from municipal officials for permitting, planning, inspections, etc.
- Increase hygiene of facilities and availability of preventative equipment.

WANTS

- County Planning Department to step in and support municipalities who have insufficient resources for a timely response on permitting, planning and inspections.
- Where social distancing and existing OSHA regulations are in conflict, err on the side of OSHA.

WISHES

- More expeditious timeliness for regulatory and public review by municipalities for permitting, planning, and inspections.
- Financial support for low income housing tax credits from the state or feds.
- Just as New York State signed into law the Emergency Disaster Treatment Protection Act (EDTPA), which expanded N.Y.S. Executive Order No.: 202.10 (March 23, 2020) that provides limited civil liability for healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 crisis, the State should expand this umbrella of protection to include commercial real estate owners (CRE).
- Clarification on the applicability of the current COVID-19 crisis as it relates to a landlord's right (similar to the Citizen Arrest statute) that permits a property owner to restrain or "detain" persons whom they have probable cause to believe have committed or are about to commit violations of their property.
- New York State should recommend (not mandate) all commercial real estate property owners create the position of a COVID-19 Compliance Officer in order to facilitate the flow of COVID-19-related information, updates to rules and regulations, sharing of the best practices.

RETAIL

- Partner with PCBC and members of the County Executive’s office, Putnam Tourism, as well as the Media to present a united front that reinforces the message that retail shopping venues are safe, if necessary precautions are implemented. We need the current language to evolve from “stay home” to “be prepared when you do go out”.
- Ensure county bus operating schedules can align with operating hours at the retail stores, and that safety measures are communicated effectively, so our residents feel comfortable using public transportation.
- Require all to wear masks and increase the amount of customers allowed inside.



SMALL BUSINESS WANTS

NEEDS

- **Disaster Trained Advisors:** To help them come up with ideas and methods to follow CDC guidelines. Ideally volunteers or no charge.
- **Specific Products at Low or No Cost:** Signage and graphics, floor markers, hand sanitizing stations, hand washing stations and disinfectants for their customers and/or employees.
- **PPE:** Gloves and masks in bulk for customers and/or employees.
- **State or Federal Funded Contractors:** For overnight cleaning that specialize in disinfectants.

- **Consultants:** Experts in online marketing and ways to pull in more customers during early reopening.
- **Training:** Advisors to help with training workers in reducing transmission through CDC recommendations.
- **Technical Help:** Setting secure work at home environments for employees, including phone communication, social media and eCommerce set up.
- **Multilingual Assistance:** For questions and to navigate the various agencies.

WISHES

- Tax breaks
- Grants or greater forgivable loans
- Complete government financial assistance until the crisis is over.

ADDITIONAL TASK FORCE SUGGESTIONS

NEED TO HAVE

GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION

- Clear guidelines for reopening of businesses -- dates, protocols, mandates --by industry.
- Consistent standards around health safety requirements for employees and customers (PPE, numbers inside establishments, queuing, etc.).
- Procedures for non-compliance.
- Best practices, even if not mandated.

EMPLOYEES

- Ceasing unemployment payments to provide incentive to go back to work.

SUPPLIES

- Free PPE for employees and customers.
- Plexiglass barriers.
- Sanitizing materials.

RISK MITIGATION

- Testing and results (access for employees).
- Release from liability with respect to infection spread.

FUNDING

- PPP use of funds for any needs (plus 8 weeks count from when they reopen or when appropriate).
- Flexible PPP loan forgiveness.
- Tax Reduction.
- To communicate with consumers regarding re-openings, procedures.

TRAINING

- To convert to an online/virtual channel.
- for contactless payment.
- For implementing social distancing measures
- For instituting parameters around consumer contact with products (try-ons, returns, etc.).

COMMUNICATION

- Messaging to ease employee/consumer concerns.
- Signage.

WANT TO HAVE

SUPPLIES

- Thermometers.
- If not free, then group purchasing for cleaning staff/sanitizing supplies.

VERTICAL SPECIFIC

- Boutique Fitness: Excluded from definition of gyms/fitness since limiting capacity and following guidelines for fewer than 10 people in space at any given time.
- Restaurant: Specific guidelines for restaurants regarding the “vague” 6 ft distancing rule. Are barriers sufficient? Loss of seating impacts ability to pay expenses/payroll.

CONSUMER INCENTIVES

- Sales tax holidays (1-2 weeks) to encourage immediate boom in retail sales when stores re-open.
- Shop Local campaign

WISH TO HAVE

SUPPLIES

- Sanitizing fogger.

CONSUMER INCENTIVES

- Hygiene Rating System (like A/B rating for restaurants).

FUNDING

- Tax breaks for businesses forced to downsize due to distance restrictions
- Rent forgiveness.
- Capital to relaunch for businesses that need to close/bankrupt.

PARTNERSHIPS

- With local and state governments to collaborate on new environment.
- Across municipalities to apply consistent criteria.

Putnam County Business Council