

ZOOM WEBINAR

Executive Summary | Oct. 26, 2020

“We Don’t Know, But Guess What ... Nobody Does”

Industries across the region continue to ponder “What’s next after COVID-19?” What will office environments and public spaces look like in the future? How will our workforce shift, and how will people come together to collaborate, celebrate, travel, and build a community? Forward-looking visions are grounded in the past, and history suggests changes to public and personal spaces will be driven by our collective response to the pandemic.

On October 26, KC Global Design presented a webinar detailing the importance of design in solving pandemic-size problems. From city zoning and sanitation planning to handrails, balconies and the quest for fresh air, design has transformed cities, living spaces and more to foster our increasingly complex lives. People from across the country joined the webinar to hear from our panel as they shared insights, expectations and even a touch of history.

The webinar included a moderated discussion addressing the future of the MCI airport, a return to work and entertainment venues and how recruiting is evolving to meet new workforce challenges and opportunities. Featured panelists were from KC Global Design member firms: Dimensional Innovations, McCownGordon Construction, and DRAW Architecture. A panelist from Entro also joined, and a special guest from the KC Chamber was also included. A Q&A session followed. Summary below:

COVID-19 will transform work and leisure

Keeping everyone safe during the pandemic is paramount. Social distancing, remote work and other practices now in place have shown that employers and leisure activity service providers have an opportunity to leverage technology to offer more flexibility during the pandemic. But what about after? Once the pandemic is over, expect pent-up demand for human interaction to drive behavior.

- Within the workplace, flexibility is key – there is a need to balance in-person team collaboration with virtual efficiency. There is greater empathy for team members and their personal situations. Employers must provide flexibility in how/where we work resulting in more adaptive company cultures.
 - 59% will be allowing more flexibility and work from home arrangements.
 - 11% expect more remote work but on a limited basis.
 - 16% still considering or unsure.
 - Only 7% will not be allowing more work from home. Expect this new norm to be part of our business planning moving forward.

- There are areas within the design and construction sector where things are very busy. Residential construction/home improvements have shown a steep rise in demand. Data center development is very active, but in the commercial sector, there is a huge slowdown in activity underway.
- The leisure sector has been hit incredibly hard as travel, dining, entertainment and theater attendance have been devastated by the pandemic. We have seen new trends in how to cope with the pandemic that are accelerations of past behaviors.
 - We have covered a “decade in days” when it comes to adoption of digital technology.
 - Online delivery, telemedicine, remote working, remote learning, online entertainment has risen.
 - Large in-person “crowd” events like concerts and movies are being replaced by small gatherings and the rise of “streaming.”

DESIGN CHANGES

The design industry is going to find more ways to innovate and be creative with safety. From smart building solutions and touchless technology, projecting a feeling of safety will be an important element of design moving forward. An emphasis on the office experience will also influence companies trying to attract or motivate employees and customers. If past is prologue, lessons will be applied across all spaces.

- The study of epidemiology was a result of the Spanish Flu. Previous pandemics/epidemics resulted in easier-to-clean spaces, wider streets, more light, brass/bronze handrails and other elements to reduce disease harboring and transmission.
- Tools exist that can be leveraged to facilitate a return to normal.
 - Testing, communications, proximity alerts, temperature checks and more can be captured, distributed, and made part of a plan to accelerate our return towards normal.
- Smart building solutions will be critical elements of design. How can technology be used to make the invisible more visible in terms of health and wellness to provide a sense of safety for occupants?
 - Ex. Technologies that can monitor distancing or temperature may have an impact on current work/social engagements but will also influence our future interactions in the office.
- Spaces that foster a feeling of safety or support technologies like video conferencing will help build a sense of confidence. More outside air, UV lights, touchless elevators and fresh water supplies all inform a sense of confidence.
- Early adopters of technology and design practices will have an impact on shaping the experience for those that follow (or don't.) They will identify the steps we can take to ensure that the improvements made have a positive impact moving for a longer term.

TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

The region should expect a shift in the type of traveler as pent up demand for travel skews activity towards the leisure market. The new MCI airport experience will have to address the different needs of the leisure traveler vs. the business traveler, and airports everywhere must focus on the customer experience to be well-positioned for the future. Customer experience extends beyond just the airport environment to places where people come together.

- Travel will continue to be a major part of our leisure and business plans but to return to the airport with confidence the space will have to adapt to changing traveler profiles and expectations. Check-in, carry-on processes, how people navigate the facility are considerations that must be thought through as part of a comprehensive plan. Other expectations of travelers include:
 - Required use of PPE.
 - Social distancing at check-in.
 - Security and more touch free technology.
- The ability to provide an experience that feels safe is important. The customer experience includes:
 - Air filtration that could assist in removing virus/disease.
 - More touch-free technology.
 - Increased cleaning of facilities.
- Air travel remains key to many business and leisure plans, but demand will shift.

- 81% of leisure travelers expect little to no change in their future travel plans while 67% of business travelers see a reduction in travel plans.
- Airports will need to adjust their amenities to cater to leisure travelers whose needs are different.
- Not all aspects of travel can change
 - If you apply social distancing, you'd need a half-mile gate area for one Airbus A380. Airports would have to be 3-4x bigger to accommodate distancing. The aircraft themselves cannot be adapted to meet all social distancing guidelines.
 - Similar to the post 9/11 airline recovery, carriers may be in a good spot for several years as demand returns and faces limited capacity. Expect a years long return-to-normal process.
- Expect purpose designed elements (shield work and guards) to be central to the look and feel of the airport experience. Coupled with changes to security protocols, technology deployments (air filtration and bio-ionization) offer a way to make the invisible, visible when there is a need to promote confidence.

REDEFINING CENTRAL "SPACE"

How we spend our time outside of work has shifted dramatically. Major gatherings and leisure activities are being transformed as a result of the pandemic. Sporting venues and universities are changing policies to encourage behavioral changes, with an eye on simplicity.

- Professional and college sports venues are responding to COVID-19 by encouraging calm at the game. (But this is temporary.) To maximize safety, venues are working to keep things simple. Fans should remember their color and zone versus the host of policy guidelines that may or may not change.
- People are more afraid of other people because they don't know how they have been behaving during the pandemic.
 - We know that people will not accept the previous experience at the theater, game or theme park. We are going to have to change the experience to reflect changed behaviors. People are going to stay more local and spend less until they know that people don't have COVID.

HIGHER ED AND RECRUITING

In response to COVID-19 many of the region's universities went virtual/ mostly virtual this Fall. Roughly 30 percent of colleges and universities have already announced plans to provide virtual instruction for the spring semester while others will make decisions based on a range of factors.

- Video is going to be used more broadly in instruction and recruiting well beyond the pandemic.
- College recruiters see video as a tool to increase the flexibility they have to engage students and prospective students.
 - COVID-19 has forced many schools to cancel in-person recruiting and career fairs so they have worked to get creative in terms of engagement.
 - 30 percent of universities have already stated some form of hybrid model will be in place in 2021.
- Internships have also had to adjust to life with COVID-19. It's important for companies to help interns enter the workplace and find ways to enable interns to bond and connect with professional staff.
 - The interaction with career people is a critical component of any internship. College leaders and employers want to make sure they have an opportunity.

Q&A

- **Lessons learned thus far in the era of COVID-19**
 - Change is hard for people, especially on top of the emotional impacts of the pandemic.
 - Being very deliberate and focused, we're seeing new efforts being made to stay connected and find positives.

- Look for opportunities to show gratitude. We need to be creative in how we engage people when we cannot be in the same space at the same time.
- **Will the pandemic influence space use at the office?**
 - Different industries will respond in different manners, and we're seeing discussions on how to most effectively use workspaces that are fit for purpose.
 - Certain work environments will evolve, and space will be reconsidered. Some clients are looking at reducing footprint driven by remote and hybrid work. Other companies are looking at increasing the amount of space given to professionals based on social distancing. These decisions are being made now and will have multiyear effects.

Moderator:

- Mary McCann, KC Global Design, Executive Director

Panelists:

- Drew Berst, Dimensional Innovations, Practice Director- Collegiate Sports
- Nancy Whitworth, McCownGordon Construction, Chief People Officer
- Dominique Davison, DRAW Architecture, Managing Principal
- Wayne McCutcheon, Entro, Founding Partner

Guest:

- Danielle Isbell, KC Chamber, Manager - Civic and Community Initiatives

Sponsor:

- **KC Global Design** -- A collaboration of leading architecture, engineering, construction, design, and technology companies located in the greater Kansas City region that impact communities both here and around the world. KC Global Design exists to elevate KC as the premier design community through our collective efforts and expertise.

For more information about the session or to continue the discussion, contact Mary McCann executive director, KC Global Design, at mary@kcglobaldesign.org. Or, visit kcglobaldesign.com.