CRA Virtual Town Hall with Denver Mayor Michael Hancock

Speakers: Denver Mayor Michael Hancock; Ashley Kilroy, Executive Director of Denver Excise and Licensing; Sonia Riggs, CRA President & CEO

Introduction: Mayor Michael Hancock

- As the State and City transitions into the re-opening process over the next few weeks, we want to lean on your thoughts and your advice so that we can do it thoughtfully and in cooperation with the industry.
- I know that everyone is aware of the challenges of COVID-19 and business closures; I have had to make some very difficult decisions to understand the best response to the virus.
- It has been very difficult to shut down businesses that we really care about and dismantle our economy after all the progress we made to recover from the recession.
- We have always wanted to aggressively respond to the virus to flatten the cure. The health and safety of our residents is the most important consideration.
- We have been touched by the industry response; from transitioning their businesses to takeout to offering free and discounted meals for hospital workers and employees in need.
- We have appointed an advisory council to help us recover. Hospitality and restaurant operators will play a crucial role in that council and we look forward to working together.

Q&A and Industry Feedback

When we re-open, should we expect to see a limitation on gatherings like banquets?

My thought is yes. We need to be cautious and manage a slow rollout because the virus is still spreading.

We encourage you to postpone the Denver minimum wage increases as a measure to help the industry.

We have made note of that, and we will take that request to Council.

Will the air circulation in the space be taken into consideration when assuming new reduced capacity? For example, will a patio have more seating?

The square footage is definitely considered, we haven’t heard consideration of the air circulation quite yet, but it is something that we want to consider for the industry if it is a concern. Thanks for bringing it to our attention.

Will the City be requiring the use of PPE, specifically facial coverings/masks? If so, would you be able to give us a lengthy timeline to re-opening so that we can order supplies?

We understand that you need time to comply with additional regulations. We want to make sure that you can open with some restrictions in place with public health being considered a top priority. That being said, we don’t know what will be required yet.
What kind of notice can you give us for re-opening so we can order supplies and retain staff? The industry wants as much notice as possible.

We recognize that you will need that time to re-open, we expect that we will be able to give 14 days notice.

Some businesses have locations in Denver, but their headquarters are outside of Denver. Because of this, they were not able to participate in the local relief grant/loan program. Can you weigh in? And can you give us a timeline for when funds will be received?

We received 12,000 applications for the program, we have approved 2,700 as of today. I think we are targeting Monday as the first disbursement of funds. We are prioritizing restaurants as a key priority for the program. People that did not get approved in the first round could be approved in the second and third round. For the business that wasn’t approved because of the location of their headquarters, we can look into the issue offline. We believe they should be able to participate in the program if they have locations and operations in Denver.

We are hearing that there will be limited capacity after re-opening, do you know what that will be?

You can assume that it will be a gradual rollout. We want to allow businesses the ability to ramp up responsibly. Maybe, in theory, for the first month, we could target 50% capacity, then reevaluate and see if we can increase the capacity. But again, we don’t know any official details yet.

Are there resources for undocumented workers who have been laid off or furloughed?

Some nonprofit organizations are providing services to impacted undocumented workers, and we can give you a list of those service providers. We also have some local services they can take advantage of too.

Denver deferred sales tax collections for 30 days. Can that be extended, or can we be put on a payment plan?

We can take a look at that, we understand that if you are not operating then we can’t expect to collect from you.

How are we going to ramp up testing?

Before we open the economy, we need some assurances that we can increase testing and contact tracing. If we can’t trace contact, then we are vulnerable to a second/more impactful wave of the virus. We are working with the state and the CDC to ramp up testing. We want to have answers for you, but we need internal mechanisms in place.

Is there a way the government can help with commercial evictions and rent assistance?
We are really limited in our powers to do that. So we are looking at what we can do for assistance, such as local relief programs. We are looking for ways to protect tenants in other ways, and we are urging federal support for businesses to make their rent and mortgage payments.

We need to be flexible for new revenue streams. How do you plan to address licensing and business plans, who will protect me going forward?

This whole crisis has opened our eyes to the realities of our current operations. We are woefully behind on technological and democratic innovations. We want to think outside the box, just as we are asking business leaders to do. Excise and License is fully operational online, and we have started taking email applications. But you’re right, when we get started again, we are going to have some backlog in our processes. We are looking for virtual hearings and some other resources for the public online. We will be there for you, and we will get you back up and running as fast as possible.

What are Denver Health’s plans to provide anti-body testing?

We recognize that rapid testing is critical for this industry. Our public health department is looking at potential vendors to conduct the best rapid testing that we can.

Have you made any efforts to ease consumer concerns?

We want your feedback for those efforts, we understand the importance of consumer confidence. We want to make sure people know they are safe going out, and we are considering a collaborative campaign to allow us to do that.

How will the economic recovery committee be funded, and how will their efforts target those in the most need?

The City is facing a $180 million economic impact. So the Economic Recovery Council will allow us to think through how to help our restaurants. Nothing could be more critical than making sure we are collaborating on those decisions. We are going to be thoughtful, and where we can be helpful we will be helpful.