



February 11, 2021

The Honorable Governor Tom Wolf
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Alison Beam
State of Pennsylvania
Department of Health
625 Forster Street, Floor 8
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania – Return to Office Strategy

Dear Governor Wolf and Secretary Beam:

We are writing to you on behalf of Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) Philadelphia and (BOMA) Pittsburgh, who manage 249 million square feet of office space, whose combined membership contributes \$4.6 billion to the state economy, \$1.4 billion in salaries and income and who have created 29,500 local service sector jobs. We represent business leaders who have a stake in the present and future success of the Commonwealth. For the sake of the Commonwealth and for all who live and work here and otherwise enjoy what it has to offer, we ask you consider revision of the Commonwealth’s current directive that “Telework must continue unless impossible” We propose instead a plan for safe and gradual return to offices, using a phased approach, just as has been done with cultural institutions, places of worship, restaurants, and casinos throughout the state.

We value our civic responsibility and commitment to the residents of our cities and fully support efforts to protect the health and safety of our workers and residents. We realize that a full and immediate return to the office environment is unrealistic for all involved. For the sake of our state and local economies, however, it is imperative that a phased return be planned for now. BOMA is suggesting a modest 25% of code allowed occupancy starting immediately – that will initially permit 2 individuals per 1,000 square feet.

The rollout of vaccine distribution over the next several months creates an additional opportunity for us to work together with our local governments. Most immediately, in an effort to help facilitate vaccine distribution, we would like to explore utilizing our member buildings as vaccine distribution site partners. Such an effort would support the phased-in return to the office environment of employees who are currently working remotely.

We acknowledge the public health impact that Covid-19 has had both locally and globally. We applaud the Commonwealth’s broad action in the early days of the pandemic to “flatten the curve” and its continuing efforts to curtail the impact of the virus. This pause enabled us all to better understand the virus and undertake appropriate mitigation measures.

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Succinctly stated, now is the appropriate time to create the path forward for a lifting of this restriction. BOMA Philadelphia’s attached letter to the City of Philadelphia clearly outlines all the steps building owners in the city and elsewhere statewide have taken to date. We want to make sure you understand that most of our member buildings have spent considerable time and made significant targeted investments preparing for the return of their tenants.

Our plan will allow for our collective economic recovery to begin in a safe and measured manner.

The negative impact on the economic and social health of the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh—and, by extension, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania – with restaurants and retailers losing the lion’s share of their daily customer base and public transit trying to cope with the financial impact of a loss of 70% of their passengers. We are gravely concerned that, if the remote working trend becomes ever more protracted, the long-term impact on the central business district office sector viability will be extremely severe as office tenants choose not to renew leases, shed employees and/or adopt a “virtual indefinite” platform allowing workers to transfer out of the Commonwealth, costing the local municipalities and State valuable revenue streams.

The current “telework must continue unless impossible” narrative is also having a negative impact on local construction, trades, and service sector jobs. The Philadelphia experience serves as a telling example. The construction and trades sectors have been idled as new construction and tenant improvements have come to a near halt, and many service sector jobs (housekeeping, security, etc.) have been lost altogether. You will note that SEIU 32BJ, which represents service sector employees throughout the Commonwealth, has endorsed the attached letter to the City of Philadelphia.

Both the local municipalities and the Commonwealth are at a critical juncture at which they should review their respective “*work from home unless impossible*” and “*telework must continue unless impossible*” messaging. While these directives may have served a useful purpose at the outset of the pandemic, going forward they may well work against the City’s and the Commonwealth’s best interests.

We recognize that a return to pre-pandemic work patterns will not happen right away and that is not what we are suggesting. Medium and large employers have been showing remarkable restraint and flexibility and will need to do so until the guidance and messaging from our governmental partners is revised.

Modifying or removing the language of prohibition from the Commonwealth’s messaging, proactively permitting a return to the office environment, establishing similar ratios of how many employees per available square foot as was done during the orange phase for restaurants, and allowing staggered start times could breathe some life back into the local and regional economy, safely generate more demand for hourly and service sector jobs, and relieve some of the burden from the City’s financial crisis.

We have already initiated dialogue with the City of Philadelphia regarding the concerns expressed here. The preemptive nature of the Commonwealth language, however, prohibits the City from

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adopting a lesser standard. In addition to our letter to the City of Philadelphia, attached you will find the suggested modifications requested by BOMA Philadelphia.

In addition to the Philadelphia organizations that endorsed the January 12, 2021 letter, the sentiments and positions stated herein are endorsed by the following Pittsburgh entities: Winthrop Management, LP; Highwoods Properties, Inc.; Millcraft Investments; and The Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership.

We look forward to working with the Commonwealth as appropriate in order to strategize on how best to balance public health concerns with economic and social concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance in this regard. BOMA Philadelphia's Government Relations Co-Chairs, Don Haas (don.haas@bdnreit.com) and Rich McClure (rmcclure@kennedywilson.com) and/or BOMA Pittsburgh's leadership, Ed Manko (Ed.Manko@am.jll.com) and Ed Page (epage@millcraftideas.com). Our collective teams are ready to engage in meaningful conversations to help jump start Pennsylvania's economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S Resinski'.

Stephen G. Resinski, CPM, RPA
Chair, BOMA Philadelphia

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E Manko'.

Edward J. Manko, RPA, CPM, BOMA Fellow
President, BOMA Pittsburgh

Cc: Mike Brunelle, Chief of Staff – Governor Tom Wolf
Rep. Kerry Benninghoff, House Majority Leader
Sen. Jay Costa, Senate Minority Leader
Rep. Bryan Cutler, Speaker of the House
Rep. Joanna McClinton, House Minority Leader
Sen. Kim Ward, Senate Majority Leader
Sen. Vincent J. Hughes
Jerry Sweeney, CEO Brandywine Realty Trust
Gabe Morgan, Vice President and State Director, 32BJ SEIU
Kristine Kiphorn – BOMA Philadelphia, Executive Director
Amanda Schaub, BOMA Pittsburgh, Executive Director
Don Haas – BOMA Philadelphia, Government Relations Co-Chair
Ed Manko – BOMA Pittsburgh, President
Rich McClure – BOMA Philadelphia, Government Relations Co-Chair
Ed Page – BOMA Pittsburgh, Vice President

Enclosures: BOMA RTO letter to City of Philadelphia dated 1-12-21
City of Philadelphia and BOMA path forward document dated 1-26-21

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