

The American Institute of Architects

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Hello AIA Michigan members!

There seems to be a great deal of debate about an issue that affects many of us. It is not the presidential election. It is when to stop working from home even when the pandemic wanes and life returns to a new normal. Some workers say never. Many firms have already decided this past summer that they were not going to require returning to the office until the end of year, or early next year. Some companies have said they will wait until the summer of 2021.

There are companies that are requiring staff to return to the office as early as the end of September. At the AIA Michigan Mid Summer conference six AE and CM firms shared how they were navigating the situation. All are continuing flexible work environments with the majority of people working from home through the end of the year. The CM's were holding biweekly firm wide meetings virtually with superintendent and field engineers reporting directly to sites. All firms reported that very few staff are working in the office.

A newly released book, *The New Corner Office* by Laura VanderKam, revealed the following about remote work. A study by FlexJobs and Global Workplace Analytics found a 159 percent increase in remote work from 2005-2017. Before March 2020, working from home during business hours was still perceived as a questionable career choice. Corporate work at home privileges were doled out as a once a week perk for people who needed better work life balance. As of March 2020, only 31 percent of the population had ever worked from home. By April 2020, the number doubled to 62 percent.

With six months of evidence, it's hard to argue that working remotely does not work. An additional Gallup poll taken later in April found that 59 percent of those who are working from home would like to keep doing so afterward. This new work environment has been also an exercise in trust. Firms which promote cultures of autonomy and provide sufficient accountability, report not only surviving but thriving.

As design professionals is there concern that creativity and collaboration may be suffering? Can we sustain doing good creative work indefinitely remotely? Studies have shown that creativity happens best when the flow of communication is clear and rapid. This usually happens best in person. Technology may be able to continue to close the gap, but for highly collaborative intense work there may be no substitute for in person work.

It seems that once we get closer to normal we will continue to have a hybrid version of present and pre-covid worlds, where autonomy is encouraged and where many can continue to work from home one or two days a week. This is an opportunity to innovate and rethink how we can improve our work and personal lives. Happier people are more creative people.

Thank you to all the creative people who planned, produced, and presented at the 2020 Design Retreat. We had 118 people who registered for the day long event. Many of the projects presented are AIA Michigan award winners, which will be honored at the AIA Michigan Honor Awards on October 9. I have heard from several members who conveyed how much they appreciated the ability to attend remotely, some would not have been able to attend an in person event. It is likely we will conduct a hybrid version for future design retreats. Our attendance was comparable to last years event, so again thanks to all on the AIA Design Retreat Committee!

Enjoy the beautiful fall and stay safe!



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