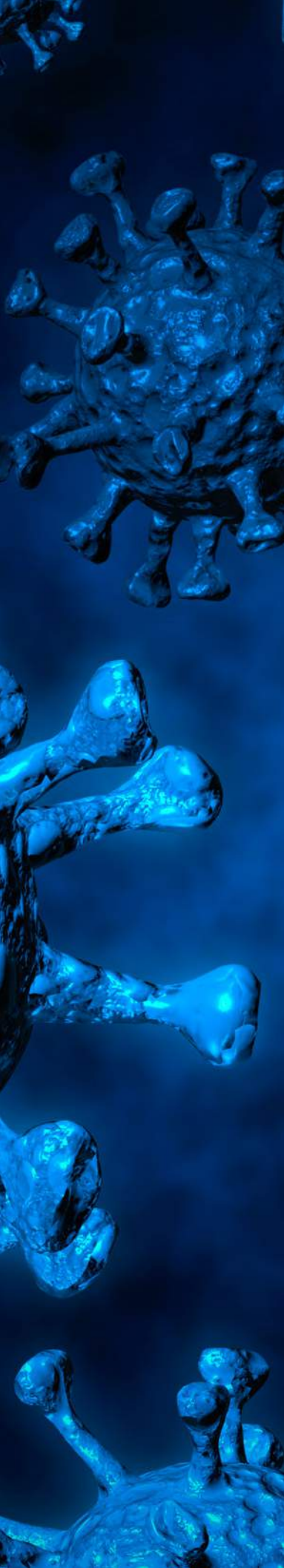# Preparing for a Second Wave of COVID-19

Joe DeRosa, *Executive Director Business Continuity of Operations, and SAFEbuilt's Chief Revenue Officer.*

5 Critical Areas of Consideration for Every City Manager, Community Development Director, and Mayor

SAFE**built**®

The global pandemic of 2020 has wreaked havoc on societies throughout the world. Here in the United States, some 41 million Americans have lost their jobs as of this writing, due to this novel coronavirus, according to **PBS.org**.

As sales tax revenues dropped off a cliff due to business closures, and payroll taxes which are usually a states' second-largest revenue source fell due to mass furloughs and layoffs, state and local governments have struggled to prioritize which problems to focus on first: addressing budget shortfalls, dealing with employee furloughs, tackling employee safety concerns, meeting the ongoing needs of their communities, or the plethora of other issues that have arisen from this pandemic.

COVID-19 has brought about a different situation than the Great Recession of 2007–2009. Not only has this crisis affected the global financial markets in an extremely negative way, but it has also brought a health and safety concern to every human being, no matter where they live. These two factors—financial uncertainty and fear of infection—have wreaked panic and uncertainty across the globe.

In the United States, there have been more than 2.2M confirmed cases of the coronavirus, resulting in nearly 120,000 deaths as of this writing, according to **Johns Hopkins University and Medicine**. In early June, the U.S. began to see a rise in new confirmed cases of the virus after weeks of declines, and now nearly every state is experiencing rises in confirmed cases. Some suggest this rise is connected to Memorial Day gatherings, while still others point to the effects of states' reopening businesses. Regardless, a rise in cases is a concern for us all.

According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, we are still within the first wave of the pandemic. The recent increases in confirmed cases are simply spikes within the **first wave.** Others in the scientific community believe we are already in the second wave. And while there appears to be some disagreement within the medical community on whether we're already in a second wave, one thing doctors and scientists seem to agree on is that we will likely see a surge of new cases as we head into the fall of 2020.

Community leaders, businesses, and citizens are working to prepare for a potential year-end surge. Essential services continue to make headlines as businesses large and small struggle to recover from the restrictions imposed during the first wave.

5 Critical Areas for the 2ⁿᵈ Wave

Working with more than 1,000 municipal clients across the country, as well as some of the country's top home builders, SAFEbuilt has identified 5 critical areas that City Managers, Community Development Directors, and Mayors may wish to explore as they plan and prepare for how to reduce the impact of this likely second wave:

01

Establishing clear guidelines on what constitutes an essential service.

Many jurisdictions struggled at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis to articulate which services were considered essential within a community. Cities relied on federal guidance, but the level of specificity in those guidelines left as many questions as it answered. As a result, there were many starts, and stops, as businesses were told they were essential, then not essential, only to land on a very gray area where many simply began to self-interpret. This lack of clarity created unnecessary frustration during an already uncertain time. Create your list of essential services and communicate that list with key stakeholders to surface any disconnects or misalignment. The general definition of "essential business" centers around wants and needs. Those things that protect health or are otherwise needed or required to live are essential; those that merely satisfy wants are not. Prescription medication is essential; hence pharmacies remain open. However, a new pair of shoes, or a new shirt, is not essential, hence the closure of malls and department stores. Where it gets tricky is in areas such as construction. Is all construction deemed essential? Is the building of a new home as essential as construction on a bridge or overpass on Interstate 80? If need be, establish a **tiger team** to vet the various tentacles of the construction industry to help inform your decision.

02 Supplemental service agreements as a safety net

Evaluating outsourcing partners to ensure you can maintain business continuity of operations is critical to maintaining the health and safety of your community. Most cities and states deemed construction an essential service; however, many jurisdictions struggled to keep offices open and to keep up staffing levels to meet their community's needs. This pause in operations created backlogs that only amplify the jurisdiction's challenges when things began to re-open as this pent-up demand surged through the front door. The takeaway, even during a pandemic, building permits still need to be issued, plans still need to be reviewed, and inspections must take place to ensure structures are safe and meet code. Considering supplemental agreements with service providers, like SAFEbuilt, that have the staff to assist jurisdictions during these uncertain times is a good way to ensure you maintain a continuity of operations.

03 Community safety and morale

Necessity has led to the development of innovative ways to address the challenges this pandemic has posed. Learning from innovations, both your own and those of others, can help to prepare you for the second wave. Many of those innovations, however, have revealed ways of doing things that are simply better, and that can have positive impacts on the overall safety and morale of your communities. Leveraging options such as remote plan review and virtual inspections help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by maintaining social distancing and eliminating the need to pass paper plans during the pandemic, while allowing cities and developers to maintain on-time projects. Additionally, they provide a means for improving the ability to timely schedule and complete plan reviews and inspections once the pandemic has passed.

SAFEbuilt provides several ways to have plans reviewed remotely and to both distribute plans to other city departments and collect input from those departments. This eliminates the need for an examiner to handle paper thereby avoiding any decontamination protocols required before dealing with paper plans.

Additionally, virtual inspections can be conducted in many areas across several trades. Whether using simple technology such as FaceTime™ or Zoom™, or more sophisticated solutions such as Librestream™, virtual inspections allow the inspectors to conduct their work from the safety of their home.

04

Hygiene and safety protocols

While most believe the donning of face masks is here to stay, it's worth reminding people that we're not out of the woods and they should remain vigilant in complying with the other basic CDC prevention recommendations. Cities should ensure they have proper supplies of PPE and cleaning supplies before the second wave strikes so that they are not facing future shortages. Now that supply chains have come back to full strength, or near full strength in most areas, you should evaluate your current supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and usage rates. If you haven't tracked usage rates, now would be a good time to begin. Try to maintain a two (2) month supply of PPEs for your team.

The CDC provides detailed guidelines for establishing and maintaining a supply of PPE and can be found by visiting **https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/index.html.**

05

A clear communication strategy

Establish an owner and charter. Who will be the individual tasked with leading communications? Who decides what will be communicated, to whom, when, through which channel(s)? Who will be part of the communications review team? For many cities, the Mayor is the central point of all external communications. He or she is providing updates, perspective, and guidance to their community. Mayors need input from their teams and understanding who will be part of the communications development team is important to avoid misunderstandings. Having an effective feedback loop is also critical to a successful communication strategy. How will you gather the questions or topics that your residents or business owners are most interested, or concerned about? How will you reply?

Prepare to be prepared

While no one can be certain whether we will experience a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first wave taught us we were ill-prepared for something of this magnitude. Use this time wisely to gather intelligence, educate your teams, and identify options to maintain a continuity of operations. Recognize that the future unknowns will require most of your energy and time so best to mitigate the known problems now.

About SAFEbuilt

SAFEbuilt is a community development services company. We provide comprehensive building department, private provider, and other professional services with the goal of helping our customers build better, safer communities.

About The Author

Joseph G. DeRosa is SAFEbuilt's Executive Director for Business Continuity of Operations and Chief Revenue Officer. His long-standing expertise in management consulting and go-to-market strategies helped him author the popular book The Customer Mindset: Thinking Like Your Customers to Create Remarkable Results. He is known for curating a leadership style that creates innovative organizational change, high performing teams, and tangible results.

Learn more at SAFEbuilt.com or click here to get in touch with a building services expert: https://safebuilt.com/speak-to-an-expert

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