



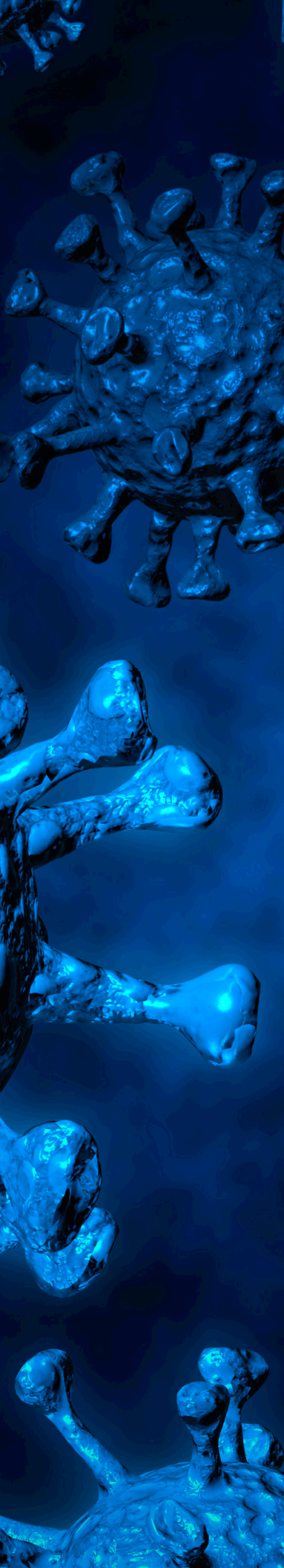
# Preparing for a Surge of COVID-19

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

5 Critical Areas of Consideration for Every Developer, Contractor, and Project Owner

SAFE**built**®





**The global pandemic of 2020 has wreaked havoc on societies throughout the world.** Here in the United States, some 20+ million Americans remain unemployed, [according to the Department of Labor](#), as of this writing. While some gains have been realized since the start of the pandemic, unemployment continues to take its toll. As revenues decline due to business closures, mass furloughs and layoffs at the municipal level follow, leaving giant gaps in services such as building plan review, permitting, and inspections. In turn, many developers, contractors, and project owners have struggled to prioritize which challenges to address first—project timelines, budget shortfalls, staffing levels, safety concerns, 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 incited panic and uncertainty across the globe.

In the United States, there have been more than 6M confirmed cases of the coronavirus, resulting in nearly 185,000 deaths as of this writing, according to [Johns Hopkins University and Medicine](#). Over the summer, the U.S. began to see a rise in new confirmed cases of the virus after weeks of declines. Some suggest this rise is connected to the increase of warmer weather social 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 summer 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 in the fall of 2020.

Business leaders, community leaders, 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 Impending Surge

*Having worked with tens of thousands of clients across the country, including some of the country's top home builders, SAFEbuilt and its affiliate partner, MTCI Private Provider Services, have identified 5 critical areas that developers, contractors, and project owners may wish to explore as they plan and prepare for how to reduce the impact of this likely surge:*

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### **Understand what constitutes an essential service and how you fit into those guidelines**

Many jurisdictions struggled at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis to articulate which services were considered essential within a community. Most areas 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 in a very grey area where many simply began to self-interpret. Take, for instance, [this recent article out of Florida](#) that discusses the differing viewpoints across the country. This lack of clarity created unnecessary frustration during an already uncertain time. If your community has a team working to draw distinctions on what construction is considered essential, volunteer to join and help lead the conversation.

## Private provider plan reviews and inspections as a safety net

Evaluating third party partners to ensure you can maintain business continuity of operations is critical to maintaining the health and safety of your business and the surrounding communities. Most cities and states deemed construction as 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, and this pent-up demand surged through the front door. The takeaway: even during a pandemic, 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 and MTCI Private Provider Services, that have the staff to assist builders during these uncertain times is a good way to ensure you maintain a continuity of operations. For example, in states where Private Provider services are authorized, we have the local presence, expertise, and technology required to facilitate the needed permits, inspections, and plan reviews to keep projects moving forward. SAFEbuilt and MTCI Private Provider Services make it easier for both the builder, and for the jurisdiction, to overcome many of the communication and project obstacles presented by the pandemic.

Be sure to explore the original Private Provider legislation out of Florida, specifically Statute No. 553.791. While Florida continues to be a pioneer in its application, recent years have seen several other states and jurisdictions implement similar policies, such as Colorado, Georgia, Maine, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas.

Today, as cities continually seek new ways to reduce cost through outsourcing, and where challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic drive additional staffing shortages and workforce uncertainty, more and more developers will be looking to leverage the benefits of the Private Provider model, possibly prompting more areas to consider adopting similar legislation.

## Professional services and the benefits

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 a surge of COVID-19. Many of those innovations, however, have revealed ways of doing things that are simply better and that can have positive impacts on the people you work with on a regular basis. Leveraging options such as remote plan review and virtual inspections, where applicable, can 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 you to maintain project timelines. Additionally, they provide a means for improving the ability to efficiently schedule and complete plan reviews and inspections once the pandemic has passed. SAFEbuilt and MTCI Private Provider Services offer several ways to have plans reviewed remotely and to both electronically distribute plans to the necessary people, and collect input from those stakeholders. 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 a variety of more sophisticated solutions, remote virtual inspections allow the inspectors to conduct their work from the safety of their home.

**Other benefits include:**

- Save construction costs and improve project schedule
- Depth of local staff—full time employees
- Local knowledge and expertise with proven track record of success
- One-stop provider
- Project experience and strong working relationship with city and/or the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ)
- Established process and tools
- Flexibility on the inspections 24/7
- Assume liability on the review and inspections
- Avoid lawsuits
- AHJ offers discount permit fees when utilizing private providers (i.e. Florida, per statute)

**04**

**Opportunity to accelerate your projects**

While the pandemic has certainly slowed down several critical economic areas, it presents an advantageous time to re-think your overall business strategy and the timing of certain projects. Take the slowdown in tourism, for example. With demand dropping in destination hotspots all over the country, several hotel projects and vacation property renovations have made their way to the front of the line.

Then there is, of course, taking note of the reduced traffic in many metropolitan areas. With stay-at-home orders still in place, as well as varying degrees of travel restrictions, now is the perfect time to bring forward projects that may be scheduled for later this year, next year, or possibly even later. Most, if not all, of these types of critical infrastructure projects have already been budgeted for and/or earmarked. Perhaps it is beneficial to move projects like those forward, while placing some of the other projects on hold in an effort



to make the best out of the situations presented by the COVID pandemic. You may even want to consider pushing the start of longer-term projects so that by the time the project is finished, perhaps within three or four years, demand will have re-established back to pre-pandemic levels. In other words, your five-year plan made need a little polishing to account for today's realities.

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## 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. Developers should ensure they have proper supplies of PPE and cleaning supplies before a surge 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 PPE 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>.

*Prepare to  
be prepared*

*While no one can be certain whether we will experience a surge 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 it's 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 MTCI Private Provider Services, LLC.

MTCI Private Provider Services, LLC. delivers a comprehensive range of plan review, inspection, and permitting services to private owner/developers. We leverage our own extensive local knowledge alongside the broader capabilities of our parent company, SAFEbuilt, to deliver the highest levels of service, expertise, and resources to each of our clients.

<http://www.mtciprivateprovider.com/>



## About The Author

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