

From MRSC: What emergency powers do cities and towns have? (published March 18, 2020)

The [Washington State Constitution](#), Article XI, Section 11 provides broad authority to cities to act in the event of an emergency, stating:

Any county, city, town or township may make and enforce within its limits all such local police, sanitary and other regulations as are not in conflict with general laws.

More specifically, [RCW 38.52.070](#) provides cities and towns with the following powers in the event of an emergency (such as the COVID-19 pandemic):

- Enter into contracts and incur obligations to combat the emergency
- Protect health and safety of persons and property
- Provide emergency assistance to victims

In exercising the powers identified in RCW 38.52.070, cities and towns are specifically authorized to bypass some statutory requirements. As stated in the statute, cities and towns can exercise the powers “without regard to time-consuming procedures and formalities prescribed by law (except mandatory constitutional requirements),” including:

- Waiver of budget law limitations;
- Competitive bidding and publication of notice; and
- Provisions pertaining to the following:
  - Performance of public works
  - Entering into contracts and incurring of obligations
  - Employment of temporary workers
  - Rental of equipment
  - Purchase of supplies and materials
  - Levying of taxes
  - Appropriation and expenditure of public funds.

[RCW 38.52.100](#) authorizes the mayor or city manager to accept the following from private individuals and corporations (as well as from the federal government via the state): services, equipment, supplies materials or funds by way of gift, grant or loan for the purpose of emergency management.

RCW 38.52.110 authorizes cities and towns to “command the service and equipment” of private citizens during an emergency.

Depending on your city classification, your city may have additional powers in your specific statutory provisions.