



**After Action Report: Winter Storm Fern**  
Event Response, Analysis, and Path to Resilience

**Town Council Regular Meeting**

**March 10, 2026**

# Executive Summary

- **AAR Meeting:** Conducted March 2, 2026, at the PATH Foundation.
- **Successes:** Communication was identified as the #1 strength.
- **Growth Areas:** Communication and Staffing were also flagged as primary areas for improvement.
- **Goal:** Evaluate the shift from recovery to labor-intensive welfare checks and bridge the "mobility stalemate."

# Incident Overview & Timeline

## •The Timeline:

- Jan 22: Local & State Emergencies declared.
- Jan 24 (Evening): Light to moderate snow begins.
- Jan 25 (Morning): Precipitation transitions to sleet.
- Jan 25 (Night): Freezing rain ends by midnight.

## •The Totals: \* Snow: 3.5 – 4 inches

- Sleet: 5 – 6 inches
- Ice: Up to 0.25 inches
- The "Deep Freeze": 150+ hours of subfreezing temperatures.

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# Operational Summary & Staffing

- Emergency Phase (Jan 24–28): \* 24-hour staffing rotations across Public Works, Police, and EMA.
  - Focus: Clearing "Snow-crete" and maintaining primary routes.
- Recovery Phase (Jan 29–Feb 1):
  - Transition to 12-hour daytime shifts.
  - Focus: Secondary road clearance, pedestrian access, and infrastructure assessment.
- Key Asset: The FY26 Wheel Loader was the "cornerstone," breaking through ice that standard plows could not.

# Key Finding 1 – Infrastructure & Equipment

- **The Issue:** High-risk dependency on a small pool of assets and staff.
- **The Analysis:** Primary routes depended almost entirely on the FY26 Wheel Loader and cross-staffed crews from Refuse/Utilities.
- **The Risk:** A mechanical failure or operator exhaustion would have paralyzed the Town.
- **Recommendation:** Continue to invest in the fleet replacement plan; re-establish reserve funds for on-call contractors in FY27.

## Key Finding 2 – Pedestrian & Secondary Road "Stalemate"

- **The Issue:** Priority 1 roads were clear, but the rest of the Town was "frozen in."
- **The Impact:** Some Secondary streets and sidewalks remained impassable for 150+ hours.
- **The Result:** Residents without 4WD were unable to leave their residence; pedestrian access to pharmacies and groceries was severed.
- **Recommendation:** Update Town Code for sidewalk removal and pre-negotiate private contracts to act as "force multipliers."

# Key Finding 3 – Administrative Capacity (EMA)

- **The Issue:** The "Dual-Hat" staffing model is unsustainable.
- **The Analysis:** The Coordinator must split focus between Fleet/Facilities operations and strategic Emergency Management.
- **The Impact:** Prioritization conflicts led to service delays and an unsustainable workload during a 24-hour storm cycle, and continue throughout the days, weeks, and months of community recovery.
- **Recommendation:** Evaluate refilling the dedicated Emergency Management FTE to eliminate systemic vulnerability.

# Key Finding 4 – Financial Recovery & Reimbursement

- **The Issue:** Manual logging of hours/equipment is prone to data gaps.
- **The Potential Loss:** Estimated **\$250,000** in fiscal recovery (60%–75% cost-share).
- **The Impact:** "Lost" expenses due to the chaos of shift rotations.
- **Recommendation:** Integrate electronic disaster-tracking into the Tyler Munis ERP system for real-time, audit-ready data.

# Key Finding 5 – Community Vulnerability (AFN)

- **The Issue:** 6+ inches of ice-capped snow created a physical barrier for elderly and AFN residents.
- **The Shift:** Emergency response had to pivot from infrastructure to labor-intensive welfare checks.
- **The Result:** First responders were diverted to perform manual labor (digging out residents).
- **Recommendation:** Formalize an **AFN Registry** and create "Strike Teams" (Municipal assets + Volunteers) for prioritized clearing.

# Improvement Plan

Issue	Corrective Action	Responsibility	Timeline
<b>Equipment</b>	Develop snow equipment deployment plan	Public Works	FY27
<b>Sidewalks</b>	Update outdated Town Code	Public Works	Winter 2026
<b>Reimbursement</b>	Implement cost-tracking in ERP system	Finance / OEM	Q3 FY27
<b>Grid Stability</b>	Conduct backup power audit for facilities	Facilities / OEM	Q4 FY26
<b>Staffing</b>	Review internal comms & cross-staffing	OEM / All Depts	Q4 FY26

# Cost Summary

## Project Summary

Applicant	Town of Warrenton, VA		
Disaster	2026 January Snowstorm		
Project	Winter Storm Fern		
Category			
Start Date of Work	22-Jan-26		
End Date of Work	4-Feb-26		
Force Account Labor	\$		127,685.31
Force Account Equipment	\$		-
Force Account Material	\$		30,975.00
Contract	\$		103,958.50
Rental Equipment	\$		8,006.00
Total	\$		270,624.81

# Cost Recovery & Appropriation

- \$65,373 Expenses for VDEM Public Assistance Submission
- \$130,000 Expenses Requested for Re-Appropriation to GF Department Accounts

# Conclusion & Questions


"Capital investment in equipment and proactive communication saved the day, but administrative and staffing gaps remain our greatest hurdles".

EXPERIENCE



**WARRENTON**

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**Questions?**