



Office of the Town Manager  
Christopher Martino

**Warrenton Town Council**  
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Eric Gagnon, Ward 5  
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David McGuire, At Large

# STAFF REPORT

<b>Council Meeting Date:</b>	March 10, 2026
<b>Agenda Title:</b>	Winter Storm Fern: After Action Report & Cost Recovery
<b>Requested Action:</b>	Receive the Information
<b>Department / Agency Lead:</b>	Office of Emergency Management
<b>Staff Lead:</b>	Johnny H. Switzer, Emergency Management Coordinator

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the unprecedented weather conditions of **Winter Storm Fern** (January 24–26, 2026), the Town of Warrenton successfully maintained essential services through a 150-hour subfreezing event. While the response was effective, it required significant unbudgeted expenditures totaling **\$270,624.31**. This report outlines the operational successes, identified vulnerabilities, and the fiscal strategy to re-appropriate **\$130,000** back to General Fund departments to restore their operational budgets for the remainder of FY26.

## BACKGROUND

Winter Storm Fern delivered a complex mix of 4" of snow, 6" of sleet, and 0.25" of ice, creating "snow-crete" conditions that paralyzed standard removal equipment.

- **State of Emergency:** Declared by the Town on January 22, 2022, enabling 24-hour shift rotations.
- **Operational Success:** The FY26 Wheel Loader was the cornerstone of the response, breaking through ice caps that standard plows could not penetrate.
- **After Action Review (AAR):** Held March 2, 2026, identifying communication as a major success, but highlighting "single points of failure" regarding equipment and the unsustainable "dual-hat" staffing model of the Emergency Management Agency (EMA).

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the **re-appropriation of \$130,000** from the General Fund balance to the respective departmental line items (Public Works, Police, Fleet, Facilities, Emergency Management, etc.). This action will replenish the operating budgets depleted by the emergency response and mechanical costs incurred during the 150-hour freeze. Staff also recommends approving the Notice of Intent form for the Emergency Management Coordinator to begin the application process with VDEM for cost recovery

### **Service Level/Collaborative Impact**

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The response involved a "whole-of-government" approach, coordinating with Fauquier County, VDEM, and private partners like Christ In Action.

- **Mobility:** While Priority 1 roads remained open, secondary roads and sidewalks faced a "mobility stalemate."
- **AFN Community:** Emergency response successfully pivoted to welfare checks and manual egress for elderly and Access and Functional Needs (AFN) residents.
- **Equipment:** The reliance on a small pool of heavy assets proved that future service levels depend on expanding the fleet and re-establishing on-call contractor reserves

### **Policy Direction/Warrenton Plan 2040**

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This report and the subsequent funding request align with the Governance and Public Safety goals of the Warrenton Plan 2040. Specifically, it addresses:

- **Resiliency:** Transitioning from reactive response to proactive mitigation.
- **Infrastructure:** Validating the Fleet Replacement Plan through the successful deployment of the FY26 Wheel Loader.

### **Legal & Fiscal Impact**

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**Total Event Cost:** \$270,624.31

**VDEM Request for Public Assistance:** Estimated at \$65,373.00

**Requested Re-appropriation:** \$130,000.00

- **Reimbursement Strategy:** The Town may be eligible for a 60%–75% cost-share through state public assistance funds. The EMA is currently finalizing a "real-time" audit-ready log to maximize this recovery (estimated at \$162k–\$202k).
- **Fiscal Neutrality:** The \$130,000 re-appropriation acts as a bridge to restore department operations, it is suggested to consider establishing an emergency contingency fund to be utilized upon activation of a local state of emergency in future budgets. These funds would be available for utilization at the discretion of the Town Manager.
- **Legal:** The declaration of a Local State of Emergency on January 22 provided the legal framework for these emergency expenditures under Virginia Code § 44-146.21.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

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A. Winter Storm Fern After Action Report (March 4, 2026)

**B. Detailed Expense Ledger (Personnel/Equipment/Materials)**