



Office of the Town Manager
Christopher Martino

STAFF REPORT

Warrenton Town Council
Carter Nevill, Mayor
Roy Francis, Ward 1
William Semple, Ward 2
Larry Kovalik, Ward 3
Michele O'Halloran, Ward 4
Eric Gagnon, Ward 5
Paul Mooney, At Large
David McGuire, At Large

Council Meeting Date:	February 10 th , 2026
Agenda Title:	Post-Emergency Update: Winter Storm Fern
Requested Action:	Confirm the Local State of Emergency Declaration
Department / Agency Lead:	Office of Emergency Management
Staff Lead:	Johnny Switzer, Emergency Management Coordinator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Winter Storm Fern was a significant snow and ice event that impacted the Town of Warrenton from January 24 through February 4, 2026. Characterized by heavy snowfall, record sleet accumulations, and a subsequent week-long "deep freeze," the storm necessitated the issuance of a Local State of Emergency on January 22, 2026. Pursuant to Code of Virginia § 44-146.21, the Town Council must now formally confirm this declaration to validate emergency actions and secure potential cost recovery.

BACKGROUND

On January 22, 2026, the Interim Town Manager, Christopher Martino, in coordination with the Emergency Management Coordinator, Johnny Switzer, declared a Local State of Emergency under Virginia Code § 44-146.21 in anticipation of Winter Storm Fern.

The Event: The storm began late Saturday, January 24, delivering a mix of snow and sleet. On Sunday, January 25, the region experienced up to 6+ inches of sleet, the highest total in decades, followed by a record-breaking 150+ consecutive hours of subfreezing temperatures.

Impact: The storm caused significant power outages across the Commonwealth and led to a spike in wholesale electricity prices. In Warrenton, the primary challenge shifted from snow removal to managing "snow-crete" (solid-bonded ice on pavement and snowpack) during the deep freeze.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend the Town Council:

1. Formally confirm the Declaration of a Local State of Emergency issued on January 22, 2026.

Service Level/Collaborative Impact

The response to Winter Storm Fern demonstrated a high level of inter-agency cooperation and a significant improvement in service delivery due to recent capital investments.

Policy Direction/Warrenton Plan 2040

The response to Winter Storm Fern aligns with the core goals of **Plan Warrenton 2040**:

- **Public Facilities & Infrastructure:** The Town's ability to maintain utility uptime (water/sewer) during the deep freeze supports the plan's goal of providing resilient and reliable public services.
- **Safety & Wellness:** The activation of AlertWarrenton! and the community hotline fulfilled the plan's directive for enhanced community engagement and emergency transparency.

Legal & Fiscal Impact

Legal: All actions taken under the Local Emergency Declaration were consistent with Virginia *Emergency Services and Disaster Law*. The declaration allowed for the suspension of certain administrative procedures to expedite the procurement of emergency de-icing supplies. Formal Council confirmation ensures all administrative suspensions and emergency procurements remain in compliance with state law.

Fiscal Impact: Preliminary estimates indicate approximately \$250,000 in preparation, response, and recovery costs from Winter Storm Fern. This includes:

- Cost Recovery: To recover costs through the Virginia Public Assistance (PA) process, the Town must adhere to a strict regulatory framework including Damage Survey Reports and meticulous documentation of all equipment hours.
- Expenses: Costs include personnel overtime, contractor support, and materials (salt/sand/supplies).

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Declaration of Local Emergency
- B. Termination of Local Emergency
- C. Snow Emergency Route Activation
- D. Press Release – Local Declaration of Emergency
- E. Press Release – Activation of EOP
- F. Winter Storm Fern - Presentation