



Office of the Town Manager  
Christopher Martino

#### 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

# STAFF REPORT

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

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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

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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

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**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

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- 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