



Office of the Town Manager  
Frank Cassidy

#### 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 11, 2025
<b>Agenda Title:</b>	The Importance of Emergency Management at the Local Government Level
<b>Requested Action:</b>	Receive the information
<b>Department / Agency Lead:</b>	Office of Emergency Management
<b>Staff Lead:</b>	Johnny Switzer, EM Coordinator

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Warrenton, Virginia, recognizes the importance of proactive emergency management and in 2020 established an Office of Emergency Management to address potential hazards and protect its citizens.

The existence reflects a broader trend of communities nationwide developing dedicated emergency management structures. This commitment to preparedness is further solidified by the Town's Code of Ordinances, Chapter 20, which outlines the legal framework for emergency operations, defines roles and responsibilities during emergencies, and details procedures for hazard mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. This chapter serves as the legal foundation for the Office of Emergency Management's activities and ensures a coordinated and structured approach to handling emergencies within the town.

## BACKGROUND

Local governments are the frontline responders and are primarily responsible for managing the response to and recovery from emergencies and disasters. Our ability to effectively mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from these events is crucial for community safety and resilience. This responsibility falls on the Mayor and Town Council, Town Manager, and Emergency Management Coordinator, whose core duties are protecting their citizens.

### **Key Responsibilities of Local Governments in Emergency Management:**

1. **Alerting and Warning the Public:** When an emergency is imminent, the local government's first priority is to promptly alert and warn citizens. This may involve using various communication channels like emergency alerts, social media, local news outlets, and even door-to-door notifications.
2. **Mitigation and Preparedness:** Beyond immediate response, local governments play a vital role in mitigating the impact of future disasters. This includes:
  - **Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment:** Identifying potential hazards (e.g., floods, earthquakes, wildfires) and assessing their risks to the community.
  - **Developing Emergency Plans:** Creating comprehensive plans that outline procedures for various emergencies, including evacuation plans, resource allocation, and communication strategies.
  - **Public Education and Outreach:** Educating citizens about potential hazards, emergency preparedness measures, and how to stay safe during a disaster.
  - **Infrastructure Improvements:** Investing in infrastructure improvements that can withstand potential disasters (e.g., flood control systems, earthquake-resistant buildings).
3. **Emergency Response:** When a disaster strikes, local governments coordinate the immediate response, which typically involves:
  - **Deployment of First Responders:** Dispatching fire and police units, emergency medical personnel, and rescue workers to affected areas.
  - **Search and Rescue Operations:** Conducting search and rescue operations to locate and assist individuals in danger.
  - **Providing Emergency Medical Care:** Establishing temporary medical facilities and providing emergency medical care to injured individuals.
  - **Ensuring Public Safety and Security:** Maintaining public order, preventing looting, and securing affected areas.
4. **Recovery Efforts:** After the initial response, the focus shifts to recovery, which is a long-term process that includes:
  - **Restoring Essential Services:** Working with public and private utility companies to restore vital services such as water, power, communications, transportation, shelter, and medical care.
  - **Debris Removal:** Clearing debris and making affected areas safe for re-entry.
  - **Providing Assistance to Individuals and Families:** Coordinating with voluntary agencies to provide food, shelter, and other assistance to individuals and families in need.
  - **Rebuilding Infrastructure:** Repairing and rebuilding damaged infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and public buildings.

- **Economic Recovery:** Supporting local businesses and helping the community recover economically.

### **Importance of Effective Local Emergency Management:**

The effectiveness of local emergency management directly impacts the safety and well-being of citizens. A well-prepared and responsive local government can:

- **Save Lives:** Prompt warnings, efficient rescue operations, and effective medical care can significantly reduce the number of casualties.
- **Minimize Property Damage:** Mitigation efforts and preparedness measures can help reduce the extent of property damage.
- **Speed Up Recovery:** A well-coordinated recovery plan can help the community return to normalcy more quickly.
- **Build Community Resilience:** Effective emergency management fosters community resilience, enabling the community to better withstand and recover from future disasters.

In conclusion, the Town government is the cornerstone of emergency management for our community. Our ability to effectively mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies is essential for protecting lives, minimizing damage, and ensuring the well-being of our communities. Investing in and prioritizing local emergency management is a critical responsibility for local elected officials.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

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Receive the Information

## **Service Level/Collaborative Impact**

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The Warrenton Office of Emergency Management (OEM) provides a vital service to the community, enhancing its resilience and safety through a comprehensive approach to emergency preparedness and response. Their collaborative impact is felt across all phases of emergency management:

- **Mitigation:** The OEM works proactively to identify and mitigate potential hazards, reducing the community's vulnerability to disasters. This translates to a safer environment with fewer risks.
- **Preparedness:** Through public education, outreach programs, and the development of comprehensive emergency plans, the OEM empowers residents to prepare themselves and their families for potential emergencies. This leads to a more informed and self-sufficient community, better equipped to handle crises.
- **Response:** In the event of an emergency, the OEM coordinates the immediate response, ensuring the swift deployment of first responders and the efficient delivery of essential services. This rapid and organized response minimizes the impact of disasters and saves lives.
- **Recovery:** The OEM facilitates the community's recovery from disasters, coordinating with various agencies and organizations to restore essential services, provide assistance to affected residents, and rebuild infrastructure. This support helps the community return to normalcy as quickly as possible.

The OEM's collaborative approach involves working closely with other town departments, neighboring jurisdictions, volunteer organizations, and the community itself. This network of partnerships strengthens the town's overall emergency management capabilities and ensures a coordinated and effective response to any crisis. Ultimately, the Warrenton OEM's service and collaborative impact contribute to a safer, more prepared, and more resilient community for all its residents.

## Policy Direction/Warrenton Plan 2040

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The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) plays a crucial role in realizing the vision outlined in Warrenton Plan 2040, contributing directly to several key themes and goals. The OEM's services and collaborative impact align with the comprehensive plan in the following ways:

- CF-2: Public safety services and policies are viewed as amongst the best in similar Virginia towns for the responsiveness, community trust, and effectiveness:
  - Warrenton Plan 2040 prioritizes the safety and well-being of our residents. The OEM directly supports this goal by proactively mitigating risks, preparing the community for emergencies, and ensuring a swift and effective response to disasters. Our efforts contribute to a safer environment where residents feel secure.
- CF-5: To provide a fiscally responsible infrastructure that maintains a high quality of life for residents, supports current businesses, and attracts new employers with a stable tax structure:
  - A key component of Warrenton Plan 2040 involves developing and maintaining resilient infrastructure. The OEM's work in hazard mitigation and recovery directly supports this goal. By identifying vulnerabilities and coordinating infrastructure restoration after a disaster, the OEM helps ensure the long-term viability of Warrenton's infrastructure.
- P-1: Preserve, enhance, and protect the environmental, scenic, and natural quality of the Town:
  - Warrenton Plan 2040 emphasizes environmental sustainability. The OEM's involvement in preparing for and responding to natural disasters, such as floods or wildfires, is crucial for protecting the environment and preserving natural resources. Our work helps minimize the environmental impact of disasters and supports a sustainable community.
- E-1: Grow a strong, diversified, and resilient economy that supports residents and businesses alike:
  - Disasters can have significant economic impacts. The OEM's efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies contribute to economic vitality by minimizing disruptions to businesses and supporting a swift return to normal operations. A resilient community is a more attractive location for businesses and residents.
- T-3: Promote Livability in the Town by Creating Great Places Where Residents and Visitors Feel Welcome and Safe:
  - Warrenton Plan 2040 stresses the importance of community engagement and collaboration. The OEM's collaborative approach, working with other town departments, neighboring jurisdictions, volunteer organizations, and the public, directly reflects this principle. By fostering strong partnerships, the OEM strengthens the entire community's ability to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

In essence, the Warrenton OEM is a vital partner in implementing Warrenton Plan 2040. Our focus on mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery directly supports the plan's overarching goals for a safe, resilient, sustainable, and thriving community. The OEM's work ensures that Warrenton is not only prepared for the challenges of today but also positioned to achieve its long-term vision for the future.

### **Fiscal Impact**

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None were identified at this time.

### **Legal Impact**

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Our robust emergency management program significantly mitigates the town government's legal, financial, and reputational risks. By proactively planning for and preparing for disasters, the Town has reduced our vulnerability to negligence lawsuits stemming from inadequate responses.

- Compliance with state and federal mandates, including those related to disaster assistance and accessibility, is ensured, avoiding legal challenges and securing access to vital funding.
- Addressing the needs of all community members in emergency planning mitigates potential civil rights violations and fosters equitable outcomes.
- Our well-defined program enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster response, minimizing costs and maximizing resource utilization.

Finally, demonstrating a commitment to preparedness strengthens public trust, protects the Town government's reputation, and fosters community resilience, mitigating the long-term social and economic impacts of disasters.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

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- A. Office of Emergency Management Actions and Plans Memo
- B. Winter Storm Blair After Action Report
- C. Office of Emergency Management COOP Memo