



Office of the Town Manager
Frank Cassidy

Warrenton Town Council

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Eric Gagnon, Ward 5
Paul Mooney, At Large
David McGuire, At Large

STAFF REPORT

Council Meeting Date:	August 12, 2025
Agenda Title:	July 16 th – 200 Year Flood Event - Confirmation of Emergency Declaration
Requested Action:	Confirm the Declaration of the Local State of Emergency
Department / Agency Lead:	Office of Emergency Management / Town Manager's Office
Staff Lead:	Johnny Switzer, EM Coordinator / Frank Cassidy, Town Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the evening of July 16th, Warrenton, Virginia, experienced a severe flash flood event, triggered by an extraordinary rainfall of 4.7 inches over three hours, with 2.5 inches falling within a concentrated 30-minute period. This intensity of rainfall has been categorized by the National Weather Service as a 1-in-200-year event. The rapid inundation led to significant disruption, overwhelming critical infrastructure, and necessitating multiple citizen rescues from submerged vehicles on main arterial roads. First responders and public works personnel were heavily engaged, demonstrating remarkable resilience in managing the crisis. While incident stabilization was achieved quickly, the event highlighted vulnerabilities in the town's infrastructure against such extreme weather phenomena.

BACKGROUND

Leading up to the event, the Office of Emergency Management (EM) had issued multiple weather alerts to town staff. Public Works and Utilities teams undertook preparatory work, including clearing storm drains, removing low-hanging limbs, and performing system checks on critical infrastructure such as pumping stations, treatment plants, and the transmission and distribution network. They also prepared staff and equipment to enter into high-flow emergency procedures.

At 19:12 hrs, the National Weather Service (NWS) issued a Severe Thunderstorm Warning. As the situation escalated, weather alerts were sent to staff via text and email at 20:17 hrs. The Office of Emergency Management, along with Facilities and Fleet, and Public Works & Utilities, was activated at 20:45 hrs. By 21:14 hrs, the full emergency operations team was activated due to reports of submerged intersections and widespread power outages at town facilities and traffic lights.

Coordination efforts quickly expanded, with VDEM Region 2 notified at 21:22 hrs and a Wireless Emergency Alert issued to all of Fauquier County at 21:31 hrs. A joint Town/County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was fully activated at 21 Main St. by 21:53 hrs.

On the morning of July 17th, a recommendation was made by the Office of Emergency Management to the Town Manager to retroactively declare a local state of emergency, effective July 16th, 2025. This recommendation was based on the recent severe flooding, the ongoing threat of additional rainfall, and

flash flooding, and the potential for loss or interruption of vital Town services, including public safety, water, sewer, and transportation, which constituted a situation of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant coordinated local government action to prevent or alleviate any potential damage, loss, hardship, or suffering.

The declaration of local emergency, issued on July 16, 2025, for the Town of Warrenton, Virginia, was terminated on July 21st, 2025, effective at 10:30 AM EDT.

Under Virginia State Code § 44-146.21. The Town Council must confirm the declaration mad by the Town Manager within 45 Days.

Virginia State Code § 44-146.21. Declaration of local emergency.

- A. A local emergency may be declared by the local director of emergency management with the consent of the governing body of the political subdivision. In the event the governing body cannot convene due to the disaster or other exigent circumstances, the director, or in his absence, the deputy director, or in the absence of both the director and deputy director, any member of the governing body may declare the existence of a local emergency, subject to confirmation by the governing body at its next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting within 45 days of the declaration, whichever occurs first. The governing body, when in its judgment all emergency actions have been taken, shall take appropriate action to end the declared emergency.*

Town Code Sec. 20-5. - Declaration of emergencies.

- (a) Except as provided in subsection (c) of this section or as otherwise provided by law, a local emergency may be declared by the director with the consent of the town council.
- (b) Prior to the declaration of a local emergency, the director shall attempt to obtain the prior formal or informal consent of the town council. However, if such consent is not reasonably practical under the circumstances, the declaration shall nevertheless be legally valid and of full legal force and authority.
- (c) The declaration shall be in writing. It shall remain in effect for forty-five (45) days or until confirmed, modified, extended, or canceled by official recorded vote of the town council, whichever occurs first. If the town council extends the declaration, it shall state the length of the extension and the conditions and procedures under which it shall be ended, if practicable. If the town council is unable to meet within forty-five (45) days, then the declaration may be renewed or extended by the director for an indefinite period of time unless and until later modified or canceled by the director or town council.
- (d) To the greatest extent practicable, the director, coordinator, or town clerk shall maintain a written record of all official actions taken hereunder for later review by applicable state, federal, and local agencies.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Consider confirmation of the Declaration of the Local State of Emergency.

Unfortunately, what were once considered "once-in-a-lifetime" weather events are becoming increasingly frequent. The recent flooding starkly highlighted the age and condition of our existing infrastructure, which struggled to cope with the unprecedented volume of water, despite the diligent preparatory work undertaken by Public Works and Utilities. The impacts on public safety, water, sewer, and transportation services were significant, demonstrating the direct threat these events pose to the health and welfare of our community.

Therefore, it is imperative that to fully commit to the implementation of our Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) and Capital Asset Replacement Plans (CARP). These plans are not merely budgetary allocations; they are fundamental to building resilience, safeguarding our vital services, and protecting our residents and businesses from future extreme weather events. Continuing to invest in these critical infrastructure projects is essential to prevent or alleviate potential damage, loss, hardship, and suffering, ensuring the long-term health and welfare of Warrenton.

Service Level/Collaborative Impact

The flash flood had a profound impact on the Town of Warrenton. The unprecedented rainfall volume, particularly the 2.5 inches in 30 minutes, rapidly overwhelmed the town's drainage systems. This intense rainfall led to significant flash flooding, which resulted in multiple vehicles becoming trapped in floodwaters on arterial roadways and required the rescue of several citizens. Furthermore, many residents and business owners experienced direct flooding of their homes and businesses, in addition to substantial impacts to critical infrastructure facilities. At the time of the initial damage assessment, the Town remained under a Flash Flood Warning, with an additional three days of rain anticipated.

The town's critical infrastructure, including wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations, and storm systems, were severely challenged and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of water from this 1-in-200-year event. This placed immense strain on public works and utilities, and demanded immediate and sustained response to manage overflows, assess damage, and ensure continued operation where possible.

Our first responders, including public works, public utilities, fire & rescue partners, and law enforcement, faced an arduous task. They responded to numerous calls for service, conducted water rescues, and managed traffic diversions in hazardous conditions. Public works and utilities staff worked tirelessly to address infrastructure failures, cleared debris, and monitored critical points like the Warrenton Reservoir, which reached Flood Stage 2 conditions and led to the impassability of Blackwell Road at the Spillway Bridge. The dedication and rapid response of all personnel were crucial in mitigating further damage and ensuring public safety during this critical period.

Policy Direction/Warrenton Plan 2040

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 alignment with Plan 2040 remains unchanged during disasters and continues to 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

This event has had, and will continue to have, a significant fiscal impact on the Town. Initial damage estimates for Town-owned property and infrastructure are totaling \$109,250 as of this writing and are expected to increase as we receive further estimates to repair the damaged infrastructure.

Beyond municipal property, the impact on our residents and business owners has been substantial. To date, we've received reports from over 75 residents and business owners across all wards, detailing damage ranging from minor flooding to multiple feet of water in their homes and businesses. These reports also indicate that many do not have adequate insurance or flood coverage, leaving a large percentage facing repair expenses ranging from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars.

Therefore, it is imperative that we accelerate and fully commit to the implementation of our Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) and Capital Asset Replacement Plans (CARP). These plans are not merely budgetary allocations; they are fundamental to building resilience, safeguarding our vital services, and protecting our residents and businesses from future extreme weather events. Continuing to invest in these critical infrastructure projects is essential to prevent or alleviate potential damage, loss, hardship, or suffering, ensuring the long-term health and welfare of Warrenton.

Legal Impact

This is a legal requirement under Virginia State Code § 44-146.21.

The severity and magnitude of the flash flood event necessitated a formal legal response. A local state of emergency was retroactively declared, effective July 16, 2025, under the authority of the Director of Emergency Management, pursuant to Code of Virginia § 44-146.21 and Chapter 20, Section 5 of the Town of Warrenton Code of Ordinances. This declaration formally recognized the emergency situation and facilitated necessary response and recovery efforts. The declaration of local emergency was subsequently terminated on July 21, 2025, effective at 10:30 AM EDT. The legal framework provided by this declaration was crucial for coordinating resources and responding to the immediate crisis.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Declaration of Local Emergency - 07.16.25 - Flash Flooding – Signed
- B. Termination of Declaration of Local Emergency - 07.16.25 - Flash Flooding – Signed
- C. Resolution for Council Consideration