

City of Bellingham Policy

Title: ENSURING CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT DURING A
PANDEMIC - INTERIM

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Chapter: Administration

Level of Policy: Administrative

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See Also: [City of Bellingham, Emergency Operations Plan](#)

Purpose

To provide policy guidance that

Ensures continuity of government operations during an extended pandemic

Supports community wide measures to combat the pandemic while providing essential government services

Supports City employees to meet personal and family as well as public service responsibilities, especially under social distancing measures

Scope

This is a universal policy and covers all employees and operations of the City of Bellingham.

Definitions

Pandemic: *Worldwide outbreak of influenza from a new virus for which humans have no immunity.* The virus would spread easily from person-to-person and cause serious illness because people do not have immunity to the new virus, and, vaccines are not yet available. A pandemic may come and go in waves, each of which can last for months at a time. Everyday life could be disrupted due to people in the same community or of the same employer becoming ill at the same time. These disruptions could interrupt or compromise the provision of health care services, essential government services, including public safety, as well as private business operations.

Social Distancing: Actions taken by the authorities or individuals to limit person-to-person contact during the pandemic. These measures may include encouraging or requiring employees to "telecommute", providing alternative means of conducting business such as teleconferencing/video conferencing, and closing schools or public gathering places such as theaters, restaurants, libraries, parks, and museums.

Essential City Public Services: Governance, law enforcement, fire and life safety, emergency dispatch (911), potable water and sewer systems, transportation, health care, utilities, food and fuel supplies as well as the work necessary to support the continuation of these services during the pandemic emergency.

Policy/Conditions

1. We Support Community Goals for Pandemic Management

Community goals are to

Limit exposure and resulting illness and loss during a pandemic

Maintain continuity of essential services

Minimize social disruption

Reduce economic losses

2. **We Plan for Continuity of Governmental Operations**

City departments plan for the continuity of essential operations/services of governance, public safety (law enforcement and fire/life safety) and public health (water, sewer), the preservation of vital records, and the basic administrative services needed to maintain these. We maintain our other public services as practical and appropriate for the situation. City departments follow established procedures in preparing for the pandemic event.

3. **Mayor Activates Pandemic Emergency Response**

State law authorizes the Whatcom County Health Officer to declare a pandemic emergency. Based on this declaration and /or directives from federal and state authorities, the Mayor activates the City's response under this policy.

4. **We Recognize Special Duty to Assist Public**

Duty to serve

Duty to maintain vital services

Duty to take protective measures

During a community emergency, City employees' duty to serve, to maintain vital services, and to take protective measures for themselves and their community are of critical importance. We, in fact, become an available and necessary emergency work force and may be redeployed to deal with the emergency situation.

5. **We Establish Orders of Succession and Delegation of Authority**

In order to ensure continuity of government, and as required by our Emergency Operations Plan, we prepare clearly written, published and readily accessible orders of succession and delegated authority.

Elected Officials

Department Heads

Officials with Code Authority

The City Charter provides for the order of succession of the elected officials. Under the Charter authority of the Mayor, department heads prepare these orders of succession and delegation of authority for their various departments. Department heads ensure these orders are readily accessible to Mayor and staff, and, are maintained current.

6. **Departments Plan for Redeployment to Vital Functions**

We recognize that the impact of a pandemic may affect City operations in a variety of ways. To ensure continuity of government, we plan for and redeploy personnel to carry out critical functions and priority support functions as needed to ensure continuity of government.

Department heads develop and/or take advantage of cross trained personnel from other departments to maximize assignment flexibility when faced with multiple simultaneous absences. These need not be an employee whose current position requires carrying out the function, but an employee who, because of experience and training, could reasonably be expected to handle the function at a reasonable and/or safe level.

Examples:

An Office Assistant in Public Works with some financial background may be deployed to Finance/ Accounts Payable

A clerk in the Finance Office could be deployed to Police Records

A Public Works Supervisor with prior work history in the Sewer and Water Plants could be deployed to operate the plants

An HR Benefits Specialist could be redeployed to ambulance record keeping

A public service Librarian could be redeployed to the City Council or Mayor's office

A records clerk in Planning and Community Development could be redeployed to Bayview Cemetery

A Parks Recreation Coordinator could be redeployed to City Hall child care duties

7. **We Support Social Distancing**

We recognize that social isolation is necessary and inevitable in a pandemic emergency to:
Limit the spread of disease, and,
Protect essential service personnel when performing their duty to ensure continuity of operations.

Departments identify in advance and prepare for implementation of telecommuting for vital City business. This includes necessary arrangements for home work stations with computer/phone access.

The City Administration and departments will make necessary arrangements for video and teleconferencing for public meetings.

As authorized and deemed necessary under the emergency authority granted by law, the Mayor may close City services such as the Public Library, Museum, Parks, and other public gathering places.

8. **We Maintain Minimum Staffing and Monitor Staff Availability**

The Human Resources Department manages a central clearing house for redeployment of employees not otherwise assigned to an essential function through their regular job assignment. Employees designated as "non essential" for the emergency report, in effect, to the Human Resources Department for their assignment during the emergency.

To prepare for maximizing staff resource availability for the emergency situation, HR and the Departments develop and maintain a list of employees capable of performing critical jobs necessary to maintain and/ or support essential city operations and continuity of government.

During the emergency we track and monitor available capable staff. We also, when necessary, cancel discretionary leaves to ensure coverage

9. **We Exercise Flexible Deployment of Personnel**

We also implement flexible scheduling to maintain our operations.

Reducing or lengthening hours of operation.
Providing a variety of alternative work shifts and work schedules.

10. We Protect Personnel and Citizens

In taking measures to ensure continuity of operations, we also help protect the health, safety and welfare of the community. However, we have a special obligation to help prevent disease spread when performing city functions. Therefore, we

- Provide protective supplies necessary to safely conduct City business and limit the spread of disease. We require their use if recommended by health authorities.
- Post public health reminders in City facilities and rest rooms, etc, for hand washing.
- Close public gathering places as ordered by the Mayor.
- Provide and encourage alternative processes to conduct vital business and maintain continuity of operations (conference calls, video conferences for Council, Boards and Commissions).

We also may require that employees take leave to protect personnel and citizens.

11. We Train Personnel

We provide training to employees regarding

- Nature of [hazard] pandemic
- Personal protective measures at home and work
- Policy and procedures (City and department)
- Essential home measures for preparedness
- How they can provide educational assistance to own neighborhood

12. We Provide Family Support

We expect our employees to experience significant family support needs because of school closures and/or their need to care for ill family members. Because of the extraordinary situation such an emergency may presents to our ability to maintain our public service workforce, we may exercise discretion in our management of pay, leave, and benefits such as

- Expanded availability of leave
- Accommodation of dependents in the workplace on an as needed and appropriate basis and/or when telecommuting is not an option
- Assistance with increased need for medical insurance coordination
- Assistance with coping with loss and grief (primarily through the Employee Assistance Program)
- Assistance with fatigue from prolonged work assignments and family care responsibilities
- Other family protection and support needs

We may also exercise discretion in administering compensation and benefits to recognize extraordinary service during a pandemic emergency.

13. City Provides Timely, Accurate Communications

We provide timely and accurate communications to our employees and citizens.

We take full advantage of established procedures for timely, coordinated, and approved dissemination of information regarding city operations and status of the emergency using

- Normal media outlets as available.
- BTV
- PIER City Emergency Information Web Site

Printed information/flyers as required

We identify in advance communication procedures for contacting and communicating with individual employees. Employees provide the City with home and family contact information and for keeping such information up to date. The City provides periodic reminders to employees of this responsibility.

14. We Plan For the Orderly Return to Normal Operations

We recognize that recovery from a pandemic event will need careful assessment, organization, and planning. Because of the likely significant impact of the pandemic on the community and City operations, we will develop methodical, structured and coordinated recovery activities including

- Determining timing and manner of formal notice of the end of the pandemic emergency
- Evaluating short and long term economic and social impacts on the community
- Assessing losses to the City, both financial resources and staff losses
- Adjusting services because of staff and revenue losses
- Planning for handling back logs of normal business
- Evaluating handling of the emergency and planning for the future

References/Sources

Washington State Department of Health, Pandemic Influenza Planning, November 2005

U. S. Department of Homeland Security, PLAN TO STAY IN BUSINESS, Continuity of Operations Planning, 2005

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA TASK FORCE GUIDELINES, Whatcom County Community Planning 2006, p.1.

Appendix/Attachments