

Pandemic Continuity of Operations Plan

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I. INTRODUCTION

Municipalities across the nation perform essential functions and services that may be adversely affected in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. In such events, organizations should have continuity plans to assist in the continuance of their essential functions. Continuing to perform essential functions and provide essential services is vital to a municipality's ability to remain a viable entity during times of increased threats from all hazards, manmade or natural.

Since the threat to a municipality's continuity of operations is great during a pandemic outbreak; it is important for organizations, in particular the City of Darlington, to have a Pandemic Continuity of Operations plan (COOP) in place to ensure it can carry out its essential functions and services to its citizens. While municipalities may be forced to suspend some operations due to the severity of a pandemic outbreak, an effective Continuity of Operations Plan can assist a municipality in its efforts to remain operational, as well as strengthen the ability to resume operations.

II. PURPOSE

This plan/annex provides guidance to the City of Darlington (City) and may serve as the plan for maintaining essential functions and services during a pandemic. This guidance/annex neither replaces nor supersedes any current, approved City continuity plan; rather it supplements it, bridging the gap between the traditional, all-hazards continuity planning and the specialized continuity planning required for a pandemic by addressing additional considerations, challenges, and elements specific to the dynamic nature of a pandemic.

This guidance/annex stresses that essential functions can be maintained during a pandemic outbreak through mitigation strategies, such as social distancing, increased hygiene, the vaccination of employees and their families, and similar approaches. Certain pandemics may not, in itself, require a traditional continuity response, such as partial or full relocation of the organization's essential functions, although this response may be concurrently necessary due to other circumstances.

III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

The City will monitor the severity of the pandemic and establish continuity activation triggers to address the unique nature of the pandemic threat. The Pandemic Continuity Plan will be implemented as needed to support the continued performance of essential functions.

IV. CONTINUITY PLANNING

All City personnel are to be informed regarding protective actions and/or modifications related to this plan. Messaging and risk communications during an emerging infectious disease or pandemic will be conducted by the Public Information Officer. Guidance and instructions on established infection control measures such as social distancing, personnel protective equipment and telework policies are provided to assist in limiting the spread at the primary and alternate worksite, which could include the following measures:

- Placing moratoriums on hand-shaking
- Substituting teleconferences for face-to-face meetings
- Staggering breaks
- Posting infection control guidelines
- Establishing flexible work hours or worksite, (e.g., telecommuting)
- Suspending work-related out-of-state and in-state travel and participation in conferences, events, etc.
- Promoting social distancing between employees and customers to maintain six-foot spatial separation between individuals; and
- Request and enable employees infected to stay home at the first sign of symptoms.

The City will frequently communicate through the PIO with employees, particularly any who are in harm's way to keep employees informed about developments in the organization's response, impacts on the workforce, and to reassure employees that the organization is continuing to function as usual. The City will develop and implement metrics for assessing worker conformance and workplace cleanliness, inclusive of the following:

- Monitor and periodically test protection methods.
- Track and implement changes in approved or recommended protection measures.
- Pre-position material and equipment onsite.
- Ensure essential personnel are at the primary worksite.
- Reaffirm that essential suppliers have their material and personnel on-hand and are able to respond and support as planned.
- Coordinate with local public health and emergency response points of contact to ensure open, adequate communications.

V. PANDEMIC PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

The overarching planning assumptions that were used in developing the organizations Pandemic Continuity of Operations Plan include the following:

- Susceptibility to the pandemic virus will be universal.
- Efficient and sustained person-to-person transmission signals an imminent pandemic.
- The clinical disease attack rate will likely be 30 percent or higher in the overall population during the pandemic. Illness rates will be highest among school-aged children (about 40 percent) and decline with age. Among working adults, an average of 20 percent will become ill during a community outbreak.
- Some persons will become infected but not develop clinically significant symptoms. Asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic individuals can transmit infection and develop immunity to subsequent infection.
- While the number of patients seeking medical care cannot be predicted with certainty, in previous pandemic about half of those who become ill sought care. With the availability of effective antiviral drugs for treatment, this proportion may be higher in the next pandemic.
- Rates of serious illness, hospitalization, and deaths will depend on the virulence of the pandemic virus and differ by an order of magnitude between more and less severe scenarios. Risk groups for severe and fatal infection cannot be predicted with certainty but are likely to include infants, the elderly, pregnant women, and persons with chronic or immunosuppressive medical conditions.
- Rates of absenteeism will depend on the severity of the pandemic. In a severe pandemic, absenteeism attributable to illness, the need to care for ill family members and fear of infection may reach 40 percent during the peak weeks of a community outbreak, with lower rates of absenteeism during the weeks before and after the peak. Certain public health measures (closing organizations, quarantining household contacts of infected individuals, “snow days”) are likely to increase rates of absenteeism.
- The typical incubation period (interval between infection and onset of symptoms) for [COVID-19] is approximately two days.
- Persons who become ill may shed virus and can transmit infection for up to one day before the onset of symptoms. Viral shedding and the risk of transmission will be greatest during the first two days of illness. Children usually shed the greatest amount of virus and therefore are likely to post the greatest risk for transmission.
- On average, infected persons will transmit infection to approximately two other people.
- A pandemic outbreak in any given community will last about six to eight weeks for each wave of the pandemic.
- Multiple waves (periods during which community outbreaks occur across the country) of illness could occur with each wave lasting two-three months. Historically, the largest waves have occurred in the fall and winter, but the seasonality of a pandemic cannot be predicted with certainty.

A. ORGANIZATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

- Organizations will be provided with guidance and/or direction by Federal, State, local and/or Tribal governments regarding current pandemic status in its area.
- Organizations will have actionable plans and procedures to assist in the ability to remain operational during a pandemic. Plans and procedures may include social distancing protocols, personal protection equipment (PPE), and temporary suspension of some non-essential activities.
- The City will review its continuity communications programs to ensure they are fully capable of supporting pandemic and other related emergencies, and give full consideration to supporting social distancing operations, including telework and other virtual office options.
- City controlled buildings will be accessible, but right of entry may be limited.
- The City may deploy to its alternate facilities.
- During a COOP event, the City may make its alternate facilities available for staff to implement social distancing protocols.
- Essential functions, operations, and support requirements will continue to be people dependent. However, human interactions may be remote or virtual, resulting in the employment of appropriate teleworking and other approved social distancing protocols.
- Travel restrictions, such as limitations on mass transit, implemented at the Federal, State, tribal, territorial, and local levels may affect the ability of some staff to report to work.
- Additional funding may be budgeted for the acquisition of additional equipment required for a possible surge in teleworking capabilities.

VI. PANDEMIC RESPONSE

A. PANDEMIC COORDINATORS AND PANDEMIC RESPONSE TEAMS:

The City Manager or his/her designee will serve as the HQ Pandemic Continuity Coordinator. The City Pandemic Coordinator will oversee a Pandemic Response Team (PRT) to anticipate the impacts of a pandemic on the City of Darlington and to assist with developing strategies to manage the effects of an outbreak. A cross section of City Department Directors will serve as a member of the PRT to support the Pandemic Continuity Coordinator. The City's PRT is comprised of the following:

- Office of the City Manager
- Fire
- Police
- Public Works
- Clerk/Treasurer
- Planning/Public Information

B. RISK COMMUNICATIONS:

The City will develop COVID-19 pandemic risk communications procedures for communicating with all internal and external stakeholders. This includes the use of existing notification rosters with names and telephone numbers for Emergency Relocation Group (ERG) personnel and non-ERG personnel. These rosters are maintained and updated by the COOP points of contact (POC). Hardcopies are maintained in Human Resources.

VII. ELEMENTS OF A VIABLE PANDEMIC CONTINUITY CAPABILITY

A. ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS

Given the expected duration and potential multiple waves of pandemic outbreaks, organizations must review the process involved in carrying out essential functions and services in order to develop plans that mitigate the effects of the pandemic while simultaneously allowing the continuation of operations which support essential functions.

The City has identified essential functions and services needed to sustain its mission and operations during a pandemic. The City's Essential Functions are listed here:

- Police Operations
- Fire Operations
- Public Works Operations – Water, Sewer, Street & Sanitation
- PIO/Communications

B. ORDERS OF SUCCESSION

Since pandemics may affect regions of the United States differently in terms of timing, severity, and duration, the City has identified orders of succession that are at least three deep per position while considering dispersing successors to various geographically separated locations, as appropriate.

The City Orders of Succession are:

1. City Manager
 - a. Clerk/Treasurer
 - b. Street Department Director
 - c. Planner/PIO
 - d. Water/Sewer Superintendent
2. Police Chief
 - a. Assistant Chief
 - b. Patrol Captain
3. Fire Chief
 - a. Assistant Fire Chief
 - b. On-Duty Shift Captain
4. Water/Sewer Superintendent
 - a. Street Department Director
 - b. Field Services Manager for Water/Sewer
 - c. Parks & Recreation Manager
5. Public Information Officer
 - a. Police PIO
 - b. City Manager

C. DELEGATIONS OF AUTHORITY

At the height of a pandemic wave, absenteeism may be significant, as such, the City has established delegations of authority that are at least three deep to take into account the expected rate of absenteeism and regional nature of the outbreak to help assure continuity of operations over an extended time period. See above Section B.

D. CONTINUITY FACILITIES

The traditional use of continuity facilities to maintain essential functions and services may not be a viable option during a pandemic. Rather, safe work practices, which include social distancing and transmission interventions, reduce the likelihood of contacts with other people that could lead to disease transmission. The City has developed preventative practices such as social distancing procedures, hygiene etiquette, and cancellation of organizations nonessential activities to reduce the spread of the pandemic. Plans have also been established to relocate to an alternate facility, if applicable.

The City Continuity Facilities are listed here:

- City Hall would move to Street Department.
- Police Department would move to Fire Station.
- City sports facilities and recreational gymnasium would close until services could be safely started back.

E. CONTINUITY COMMUNICATIONS

Workplace risk can be minimized through implementation of systems and technologies that facilitate communication without person- to-person contact. The City has identified communication systems needed to perform essential functions.

The City Continuity Communications plan for a pandemic is listed here as the City will communicate with City employees and citizens through:

- Mobile Text Alerts
- City Social Media Pages
- City Website
- Local media stations/organizations

F. ESSENTIAL RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The City shall identify, protect, and ensure the ready availability of electronic and hardcopy documents, references, records, and information systems needed to support essential functions during a pandemic outbreak. The City has identified systems, databases, and files that are needed to ensure essential functions remain operational.

The City's Essential Records plan for a pandemic is listed here.

- Back up of all computer servers daily (ATG)
- Maintain contact with (ATG) to ensure all Systems are working properly.
- Maintain manning in PD, FD and Treasurer to access hardcopy documents.

G. HUMAN RESOURCES

Although a pandemic outbreak may not directly affect the physical infrastructure of an organization, a pandemic will ultimately threaten all operations by its impact on an organization's human resources. The health threat to personnel is the primary hazard to maintaining essential functions and services during a pandemic outbreak.

The City has established plans to protect the entire employee population and their families, with additional guidance for key personnel, ERG members, and other essential personnel, should a pandemic outbreak occur. The City's Human Resource plan is listed here:

- Keep all employees informed of any Local Pandemic outbreaks.
- Make available materials so employees can wash and sanitize their hands on a regular basis.
- Work with BlueCare On Demand to ensure our employees, their families and elected officials have availability to any medications needed.

The Clerk/Treasurer will coordinate protocol for managing employee absenteeism and the application of Federal and State mandates including but not limited to FMLA, ADA, and associated benefits. Current sick and sick pool policies remain in effect.

Policy adjustments and recommendations are to be approved by the City Manager.

Centralized illness reporting including concerns, guidance, callouts, questions, etc. will be reported using the main Clerk/Treasurer number (843-398-4000 x102).

H. TEST, TRAINING AND EXERCISES

Testing, training, and exercising are essential to assessing, demonstrating, and improving an organization's ability to maintain its essential functions and services.

The City will conduct annual tests, training, and exercises to ensure sustainable social distancing techniques, and to assess the impacts of reduced staff on the performance of essential functions. Also, the City will conduct continuity exercises to examine the impacts of a pandemic on performing essential functions, and to familiarize personnel with their responsibilities. The organization has identified resources and trained continuity personnel, needed to perform essential functions.

I. DEVOLUTION OF CONTROL AND DIRECTION

Devolution is the process of transferring operational control of one or more essential functions to a pre-determined responsible party or parties. Pandemic outbreaks will occur at different times, have variable durations, and may differ in the severity; therefore, full or partial devolution of essential functions may be necessary to continue essential functions and services. The City has established plans and procedures for devolution, which identifies how it will transfer operations, if a pandemic renders leadership and essential staff incapable or unavailable. The City would transfer control of City departments to Darlington County should the City be incapable of maintaining essential services to its citizens.

J. RECONSTITUTION

Reconstitution is the process whereby an organization has regained the capability and physical resources necessary to return to normal (pre-disaster) operations. The objective during reconstitution is to effectively manage, control, and, with safety in mind, expedite the return to normal operations. The City has developed reconstitution plans and procedures, in conjunction with local public health authorities, to ensure facilities/buildings are safe to return. The City's reconstitution plan considers the possibility that not all employees may be able to return to work at the time of reconstitution and that it may be necessary to hire temporary or permanent workers in order to complete the reconstitution process.

The City's Reconstitution plan for a pandemic is listed here:

- Available manning will be reviewed by City Manager, Clerk/Treasurer and all Department Heads.
- Any manning shortages will be addressed by:
- Requesting assistance from state agencies, counties and local municipalities.
- If the above does not cover needs, the City will work with local temp agencies to acquire needed staff.
- All facilities would be assessed and deemed safe for staff and citizens by local health officials.
- As employees become healthy enough to return to work, the City would use BlueCare On Demand to test employees for fitness for work.

K. CONCLUSION

Maintaining the City's essential functions and services in the event of a pandemic requires additional considerations beyond traditional continuity planning. Unlike other hazards that necessitate the relocation of staff performing essential functions to an alternate operating facility, a pandemic may not directly affect the physical infrastructure of the organization. As such, a traditional "continuity activation" may not be required during a pandemic outbreak. However, a pandemic outbreak threatens an organization's human resources by removing essential personnel from the workplace for extended periods of time. Accordingly, the City's continuity plan addresses the threat of a pandemic outbreak.

Continuity Plans for maintaining essential functions and services in a pandemic situation should include implementing procedures such as social distancing, infection control, personal hygiene, and cross-training (to ease personnel absenteeism in a critical skill set). Protecting the health and safety of key personnel, ERG members, and other essential personnel must be the focused goal of the organization in order to enable the organizations to continue to operate effectively and to perform essential functions and provide essential services during a pandemic outbreak.