

Town of Bethlehem Plan for Operations in the Event of a Declared Public Health Emergency involving a Communicable Disease

January 13, 2021

BACKGROUND

On September 7, 2020, Governor Cuomo added section 27-c to the NYS Labor Law which requires all public employers to develop plans for operations in the event of a declared public health emergency involving a communicable disease. The purpose of the plans is to ensure the safety of employees and contractors.

The need for these protocols was driven home in 2020 during the global outbreak of COVID-19. This pandemic had profound effects on the Town of Bethlehem, and forced our Town government to make rapid adjustments in our operations to ensure that we continued to deliver key services while keeping our employees and contractors safe.

The following plan is a dynamic document designed to be concise so it can be easily referenced, and flexible so actions can be adjusted to account for the different risks and circumstances of communicable disease outbreaks. Standard throughout the plan, regardless of the type of future disease outbreak, are commitments to ensuring the safety of our staff and contractors, and to ensuring the delivery of critical Town services on which our residents and businesses depend.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

There are five core elements of emergency preparedness.

- **Prevention** – By following best practices to avoid infection, communicable diseases can be controlled before they become epidemics.
- **Preparation** – As COVID-19 demonstrated, serious communicable diseases can break out at any time, so we must be ready to adapt when outbreaks occur, and to flexibly adjust to the specific risks associated with different diseases. This plan lays out guidelines for the Town of Bethlehem's responses to communicable disease outbreaks.
- **Mitigation** – The Town must make every effort to reduce the possibilities of a serious health emergency involving communicable diseases by following recommended health directions on a daily basis and maintaining an internal environment that protects ourselves, our colleagues, and the people we serve.
- **Response** – We must tailor the guidelines in this plan to account for the specific risks associated with a communicable disease outbreak. Two core concepts to ensuring the safety of our employees and contractors as they work are self/group protection and limiting the transmission of the disease within the workplace. Depending on the type of outbreak and demands of each position, these responses may include adjusting work hours, wearing personal protective equipment, working remotely, and managing the distribution of inoculations or vaccinations.
- **Recovery** – When the health risks of a communicable disease outbreak have receded, we will need to coordinate with businesses, community groups, and residents to return to normalcy. We should also review the outbreak and our responses to translate lessons learned into updates to this plan.

PLAN REQUIREMENTS

The amended state law requires public employers like the Town of Bethlehem to prepare the following plan components.

- A list of positions that must be performed on-site.
 - The law refers to these positions as “essential,” but we use the term “on-site employees” in this plan as the law’s use of the term “essential” is inconsistent with how it is used in other emergency management contexts, and can be misconstrued to mean the people who are able to undertake all or some of their work off-site are less important.
- Protocols for:
 - (1) refining the list of on-site employees;
 - (2) facilitating and enabling remote work;
 - (3) staggering work shifts;
 - (4) setting leave policies;
 - (5) guiding the procurement, storage, and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE);
 - (6) screening and identifying employees who may have contracted the disease (ideally through symptom-based home testing);
 - (7) cleaning and disinfection procedures for work spaces and public areas;
 - (8) gathering information to facilitate contact tracing for employees, contractors, and clients (including documentation of work hours and work locations); and
 - (9) identifying emergency housing for employees.

The Town has developed additional protocols for:

- (10) setting guidelines for use of Town facilities by volunteers and others who are not employed by the Town or working for the Town as contractors;
- (11) determining when the Town Supervisor should issue a Declaration of Emergency with accompanying Special Orders;
- (12) setting expectations for companies providing contract services to the Town.

ON-SITE EMPLOYEES

As noted above, we use the term “on-site employees” rather than “essential employees” in this plan. The law’s use of the term is inconsistent with how it is used in other emergency management contexts, and can be misconstrued to mean the people who are able to undertake all or some of their work off-site are less important.

The work sites of Town employees vary dramatically. Some positions work primarily in the field, while others work entirely from offices. The adjustments needed to ensure these employees have safe workspaces will vary from position to position, depending on the risks associated with each communicable disease outbreak.

Some positions can conduct their work entirely from remote locations, though most will need periodic access to resources at their workspaces. As such, we have introduced a third employee classification, “Partial On-Site,” to address employees who can primarily work remotely but may need periodic access to their workspaces in Town facilities.

See Appendix 1 for a comprehensive list of Town employees, by Department, and their initial classification as On-Site, Partial On-Site, and Off-Site.

In addition to employees, the law also requires planning for contractors who are working on a Town site based on a contract with the Town.

PROTOCOLS

The protocols set forth below are somewhat general as the risk factors will vary between different communicable diseases. That said, the vector of transmission that is of greatest concern in our Town facilities is airborne droplets that are sneezed, breathed, or coughed from an infected person. The other routes of transmission (e.g., fecal-oral like cholera, vector borne like West Nile virus from mosquitoes, and blood transferal like hepatitis C) are unlikely to be widely spread within our Town facilities.

- (1) **ON-SITE EMPLOYEE LIST:** Department Heads will assess the list of on-site employees identified in Appendix 1 to determine if any changes need to be made for their staff in the context of the specific risks associated the communicable disease outbreak.
 - On-Site and Partial On-Site employees will report to their workplaces as instructed.
- (2) **REMOTE WORK:** Department Heads may allow staff to work from remote locations in order to reduce the number of employees working within Town facilities, especially in the event of a mandatory workforce reduction issued by the Governor.
 - As feasible, and recognizing the critical need to ensure the security of the Town’s computer systems, the Management of Information Services Department will work with Department Heads to develop secure access to electronic Town files for employees working from their personal computers at remote locations.
- (3) **STAGGERED SHIFTS:** In order to reduce the number of employees working within Town facilities, especially in the event of a mandatory workforce reduction issued by the Governor, Departments may shift on-site work hours. These hours may be shifted to begin earlier in the day, end later in the evening, or include time during the weekend. Comp time will not be accrued for shifted schedules unless the employee works longer than standard work week. Overtime will not earned for shifted schedules unless the employee works longer than standard 40 hour work week.
- (4) **LEAVE POLICY:** Specific leave policies will be developed to address the specific risks, circumstances, and health guidelines associated with a communicable disease outbreak. In general, employees who have undertaken activities outside of work that may have exposed them to infection (e.g., travelled to a state requiring mandatory quarantine) must use accrued leave while awaiting test results. Also in general, employees who have tested positive for the communicable disease and/or have been placed in mandatory quarantine by the Albany County Dept of Health will not have to use accrued time during their recovery period. This is subject to change per Governor executive orders and Albany County Guidelines.
- (5) **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT:** The Office of Emergency Management will coordinate the procurement, stocking, and distribution of necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for employees and authorized contractors.
 - On a normal basis, the town will maintain a 90-day inventory of selected PPE and cleaning products.
 - Purchasing and restocking of new PPE and cleaning items will be based on health guidance, protective needs, circumstances, and products available at that time.
 - PPE and cleaning products will be distributed to employees and departments as needed.
 - Requests for additional PPE or specialized products that may be necessary due to the specific risks associated with the communicable disease outbreak should be made to an employee’s immediate supervisor, who will then notify their Department Head. The request will then be forwarded to the Office of Emergency Management, who will review existing inventories and will endeavor to locate, purchase, and stock additional PPE and

cleaning products as needed, again based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, NYS Department of Health, and Albany County Department of Health.

- (6) **WORKPLACE SAFETY SCREENING:** All employees entering a Town facility must adhere to the following protocols, subject to change in response to guidance from the NYS Dept of Health relating to the specific risks associated the communicable disease outbreak:
- take their temperatures before coming to a Town facility to ensure they do not have a fever;
 - wear masks when entering and exiting the building, and also when outside of their work stations (e.g., going to the printer or walking in the hall), and when interacting with others closer than 6’ apart;
 - wash and/or disinfect their hands regularly, including when entering and exiting the building;
 - practice proper sneezing and coughing etiquette;
 - stay 6’ apart;
 - wipe down printers and copiers with disinfectant after using them; and
 - contact their supervisor and not enter a Town building if they feel ill.

As feasible, the Town will collaborate with the State of New York, Albany County (including the Albany County Health Department), and neighboring municipalities to assist in the establishment of a local testing site that can be used by employees, contractors, and emergency responders.

- (7) **CLEANING & DISINFECTION:** Our standard operations are already designed to limit the normal spread of infectious diseases like the flu. In the event of a serious new communicable disease outbreak, our protocols will be heightened, subject to changes in response to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, NYS Department of Health, and Albany County Department of Health relating to the specific risks associated the communicable disease outbreak, as follows.
- All handles, public counters, stairway railings, elevator buttons, and water fountains will be sanitized on a daily basis.
 - Employees will sanitize their own work stations and associated office equipment.
 - Hand sanitizer will be available at facility entries, public counters, and offices.

- (8) **CONTACT TRACING:** To support contact tracing by the Albany County Department of Health, all employees will compile, or have the ability to quickly compile, the following information for meetings held in Town facilities and for volunteers working in Town facilities. The final list will be tailored to address the specific risks associated with transmission of the communicable disease and guidelines issued by the NYS Department of Health. A standard form will be developed if meetings are regularly held in person.
- Did the individual travel to a place the State of NY has placed on an advisory watch list?
 - Does the individual reside with, or have they had close contact with, someone who has travelled to a place the State of NY has placed on an advisory watch list?
 - Has the individual been diagnosed with, or had close contact with, anyone diagnosed with the disease?
 - Is the individual experiencing flu-like systems (such as cough, shortness of breath, fever of 100°F or more, or chills), or other systems symptomatic of the communicable disease?
 - Has the individual been directed to quarantine, isolate, or self-monitor at home by a doctor, hospital, or governmental health agency?
 - Name, address, contact information.

- (9) **EMERGENCY HOUSING:** The Town of Bethlehem will, to the best of its ability, find suitable housing for displaced employees due to a declared State of Emergency involving a communicable disease. The Town will review available sheltering locations on a case-by-case basis in conjunction with the Red Cross and Salvation Army.
- (10) **NON-EMPLOYEE USE OF TOWN FACILITIES:** Town facilities may be closed to the public should the Town Supervisor determine that all services can still be delivered. While all reasonable efforts will be made to deliver services by phone, online, or outside of Town facilities, some services require in-person meetings. For these services, Town facilities may be opened to volunteers and visitors provided they abide by the following protocols. The final list will be tailored to address the specific risks associated with transmission of the communicable disease and guidelines issued by the NYS Department of Health.
- All volunteers and members of the public (with an appointment) entering the Town facility will be screened for the communicable disease by answering a set of questions and having their temperatures taken.
 - Visitors will be escorted by a staff member when entering and exiting the building. They will not have access to any part of the Town facility other than designated work stations and bathrooms near their workspace or meeting location.
 - Volunteers and visitors must wear masks when away from workstations and meeting rooms, and when interacting with others closer than 6 feet apart.
 - Volunteers will be given easily recognized identification tags while they are in the Town facility.
 - All volunteer work stations will be sanitized when work is completed.
 - Records for volunteers and visitors will be taken as outlined in #8 CONTACT TRACING above.
- (11) **STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARATION:** Should a serious health hazard, epidemic/pandemic occur that will affect the overall health and wellbeing of Town residents, businesses, and Town employees/on-site contractors, the Town Supervisor, or their designee, may declare that a Declaration of Emergency exists following the legal requirements set forth in the Town of Bethlehem’s Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (Appendix 3, Annex 18). The Town Supervisor will issue Special Orders, as appropriate, in consultation with the Town’s Emergency Management Office, Town Attorney, and Town Board (CEMP, Attachment 2).
- (12) **CONTRACTORS:** Contractors working on Town-owned facilities will be required to follow all guidelines set for Town employees, including providing their staff with Personal Protective Equipment, modifying work schedules, and enabling work from remote locations (as appropriate). It is the responsibility of the Contractor to require and periodically test their on-site employees and furnish results to the Town’s Emergency Management Office. No Contractor employee will be allowed on-site should they test positive and/or not have been tested within an agreed time period.

APPENDIX 1 – Town Employees

As of January, 2021, Town employees are classified as On-Site, Partial On-Site, and Off-Site as follows.

- “**On-Site**” employees can only conduct their work in Town facilities or in the field with their work starting and ending in a Town facility. These employees correlate to the state law’s term “essential employees,” but that use is inconsistent with how the term is used in other emergency management contexts, and can be misconstrued to mean the people who are able to undertake all or some of their work off-site are less important.
- “**Partial On-Site**” employees can conduct some or most of their work remotely, but will require periodic access to their workspaces within Town facilities.
- “**Off-Site**” employees can complete all of their work responsibilities from remote locations.

Assessor’s Office

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site (3) 1 Assessor; 2 Senior Assessment Clerks
- Off-Site

Clerk’s Office

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site (2) – 1 Town Clerk; 1 Deputy Town Clerk
- Off-Site

Comptroller’s Office

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site
- Off-Site (3) 1 Comptroller, 2 Chief Accountants

Emergency Management Office

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site (2) 1 Director; 1 Deputy Director
- Off-Site

Highway Department

- On-Site (50) 1 Highway Superintendent; 2 Foreman II; 1 Fleet Maintenance Foreman; 2 Foreman I; 2 Labor Sub-Foreman; 9 Equipment Operator II; 11 Equipment Operator I; 6 Automotive Mechanic; 6 Laborer I; 10 Laborer II
- Partial On-Site (3) 1 Manager of Clerical Operations; 1 Confidential Secretary; 1 Recycling Coordinator
- Off-Site

Human Resources Department

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site (3) Director of Human Resources, Personnel Assistant 1; Personnel Assistant II
- Off-Site

Justice Department

- On-Site (6) 2 Town Justices; 1 Clerk to the Justices; 3 Clerks
- Partial On-Site
- Off-Site

Management of Information Services Department

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site (1) Director of MIS
- Off-Site (1) Information Services Specialist

Parks & Recreation Department

- On-Site (5) 1 Highway Foreman; 1 Labor Sub Foreman; 3 Recreation Maintenance Person
- Partial On-Site (4) 1 Administrator, 1 Assistant Administrator, 1 Recreation Administrative Assistant, 1 Account Clerk Typist
- Off-Site

Planning & Economic Development Department

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site (7) 1 Director of Planning; 2 Planning & Building Assistants; 1 Building Inspector; 1 Senior Code Enforcement Officer; 2 Assistant Building Inspectors
- Off-Site (5) 2 Senior Planners; 1 Open Space Coordinator, 1 Senior Planner/Economic Development Coordinator; 1 Planning and Building Assistant

Police Department

- On-Site (52.5) 1 Chief; 3 Commanders; 8 Sergeants; 5 Detectives; 19 Officers; 1 IT Officers; 11 Telecommunicators; 2 Records Clerks; 1 Confidential Secretary; 1 full & 1 ½ time Animal Control
- Partial On-Site
- Off-Site

Public Works Department

- On-Site (44) 1 Deputy Chief Water Treatment Plant Operator; 2 Senior Water Treatment Plant Operator; 1 SCADA and Automation Coordinator; 5 Water Treatment Plant Operator; 1 Instrumentation Mechanic; 1 Water Treatment Plant Operator Trainee; 4 Water Treatment Plant Laborer; 1 Chief Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator; 1 Assistant Chief Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator; 1 Senior Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator; 2 Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator; 1 Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator Trainee; 2 Laborer II; 2 Utility Foreman II; 1 Utility Foreman I; 1 Utility Locator; 2 Senior Water and Sewer Maintenance Person; 3 Water and Sewer Maintenance Person; 1 SCADA and Automation Specialist; 5 Utility Service Helper; 2 Equipment Operator II/Maintenance Mechanic; 1 Equipment Operator I; 1 Building Maintenance Mechanic; 2 Building Maintenance Helper
- Partial On-Site (9) 1 Commissioner of Public Works; 1 Deputy Commissioner of Public Works/Town Engineer; 1 Senior Engineer; 2 Assistant Engineer; 1 Principal Engineering Technician; 1 Engineering Technician; 1 Environmental Scientist Technician; 1 Chief Water Treatment Plant Operator
- Off-Site (6) 1 GIS Coordinator; 1 Director of Field Operations; 1 Supervisor of Administration; 2 Utility Billing Clerk; 1 Procurement Clerk

Receiver of Taxes Office

- On-Site
- Partial On-Site (2) 1 Receiver of Taxes; 1 Deputy Receiver of Taxes
- Off-Site

Senior Services Department

- On-Site (2.5) 1 Director of Senior Services; 1 Senior Services Coordinator; .5 Outreach Worker
- Partial On-Site
- Off-Site (4) 1 Senior Service Coordinator; 1 Program Assistant; 1 Senior Outreach Worker; 1 Outreach Worker

Supervisor's Office

- On-Site – none
- Partial On-Site (2) 1 Confidential Secretary, 1 Town Supervisor; 0.5 Industrial Development Agency Executive Director
- Off-Site – (1) 1 Town Historian