After-Action Report

Winter Storms Fern & Gianna

Richmond, Virginia
March 2026

A Letter From the Mayor's Desk

In January 2026, Richmond experienced a really unprecedented stretch of cold, icy conditions. I'm writing to you during a week that's promising 80 degree temperatures, and yet I can still feel that bitter cold and icy streets—and I know you can, too.

Average snowfall in our winter months tests so many of our community institutions, like our schools, our government operations, and our social safety nets. For a winter weather event to be compounded by significant amounts of ice—and lingering, freezing temperatures that prevented that ice from melting for days on end—tested us even further.

An After-Action Report compiles the facts and data of an extreme event, like our experience of Winter Storms Fern and Gianna, in order to help participants make sense of what emergency operations went well and what needs work. Emergency preparation and responses is an ongoing, critical effort for any government body, and I'm proud to see the City of Richmond continuing to make strides in the way we plan for, respond to, and reflect on emergency situations.

And the good news is that a lot went well during these winter storms. We implemented a new Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC) that allowed for faster information-sharing and decision-making. We used every shelter and warming center resource at our disposal in an effort to reach Richmonders who needed somewhere safe and warm during winter weather. We committed to providing you all with regular updates through our various communications channels. And even with a treacherous roadway landscape, snow and ice removal crews were out on the streets 24 hours a day making progress.

That's not to suggest that the days of ice and cold were easy on our communities, particularly for our most vulnerable residents. We continue to have a lot of work to do to make sure that every single Richmonder has the information and resources they need to navigate an emergency safely. I can't think of more important work to be doing day in and day out.

I hope you'll explore this After-Action Report as the promise it is—a promise to keep sharing with you what's happening behind the scenes of your government; a promise to keep asking questions, looking at the data, and fixing the problems we find; and a promise to always remember that behind every set of emergency operating procedures or new processes are the neighbors whose lives are shaped by the decisions we make.

In gratitude for the continued opportunities to listen, learn, and serve.

Sincerely,

Mayor Danny Avula

A Letter From the CAO

Pursuant to Section 12-19 of the City Code, which requires the Chief Administrative Officer to submit a written report 30 days after the conclusion of a declared emergency, detailing the full fiscal and budgetary impact of that emergency, please accept this robust offering as the official transmittal for Winter Storms Fern and Gianna. Section 12-19 requires documentation of the fiscal and budgetary impacts associated with emergency expenditures. This report fulfills the requirement on behalf of the Avula administration and provides the required financial accounting and expenditure detail in accordance with the Code.

While meeting this statutory obligation is important, I believe that it is also our duty to present a comprehensive record of the City's response. While the Code appropriately emphasizes fiscal transparency and accountability, the scope of a compound winter emergency extends beyond the financial impact alone. This report therefore documents not only the budgetary effects, but also the operational posture, interdepartmental coordination, life-safety measures, infrastructure continuity, regional alignment, and service delivery efforts that defined the City's response.

These back-to-back storms required sustained activation, 24-hour operations across multiple departments, coordinated sheltering and warming operations, infrastructure protection, emergency communications management, and disciplined fiscal controls. This report reflects the full extent of those efforts and provides a complete account of both operational execution and financial stewardship.

More importantly, this document also reflects the hard work, professionalism, and dedication of City staff who operated under extended and demanding conditions to protect residents and maintain essential services. Across all departments, employees demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to public service throughout the duration of the emergency. In the face of challenging circumstances City staff continue to innovate. Full implementation of the Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC) builds on lessons learned from the 2025 water system event, ensuring real time information-sharing and decision-making not previously possible. Similarly, we connected services across our park, library, and 311 systems to create new and expand shelter offerings. The launch of libraries as warming centers used in other large cities including Atlanta, Baltimore, and the District of Columbia are clear signs of our commitment to provide Richmonders a place to remain safe and warm.

I share this report, with sincere thanks for their effort and commitment in the face of uncertainty. This public facing report serves as formal transmittal of the Avula administration's update in accordance with Section 12-19. The Administration will continue to integrate lessons learned and refine operational practices as part of our ongoing commitment to preparedness, accountability, and service excellence.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Administrative Officer Odie Donald II

I. Executive Overview

This after-action report provides a snapshot of City of Richmond's operations before, during, and after Winter Storms Fern and Gianna. These activities, as well as real-time adjustments, aimed to mitigate the impacts of both winter storms on the more than 1.1 million residents of the region.

A. 2026 Winter Activity Context

Early Winter Activity

In January of 2026, the Richmond region was impacted by a notable winter storm and extended cold that brought snow, sleet, freezing rain, and temperatures at or below freezing for several days, prompting both city and state emergency declarations ahead of the event. Snow and wintry mix created hazardous travel conditions through the weekend of January 24–26, with icy roads lingering as temperatures remained cold into the following week. Throughout the Commonwealth, authorities reported hundreds of weather-related crashes during the storm, and travel and infrastructure disruptions were widely felt as crews worked to clear roadways. Additionally, bitterly cold temperatures and wind chill prompted cold-weather advisories later in the month, underscoring a period of prolonged winter impacts around Richmond in early January 2026.

Back-to-Back Winter Weather Events

Back-to-back Winter Storms Fern and Gianna significantly strained local governments' ability to respond effectively by compressing response and recovery timelines while depleting critical resources. With personnel already fatigued from extended operations during the first storm, agencies faced increased overtime costs, and reduced surge capacity when the second storm struck.

Early-season Timing for the Region

Winter Storms Fern and Gianna ushered in colder and snowier conditions much earlier than Central Virginia typically experiences. Their early arrival disrupted seasonal expectations and preparedness cycles across the region. Significant snowfall and sustained subfreezing temperatures arrived well before the climatological peak of winter, catching some residents, schools, and local government operations in early-season mode rather than full winter readiness. The early onset of accumulating snow and prolonged cold strained road treatment inventories, accelerated overtime for snow removal crews, and increased demand for warming shelters and utility restoration at a time when such resources are not usually deployed at scale.

B. Strategic Response Posture

Whole-of-Government Approach

The Avula administration has adopted a holistic approach to emergency management. A local government's strategic emergency response posture is strongest when it adopts a whole-of-government approach that integrates all departments, agencies, and community partners into a unified framework before, during, and after a crisis. This posture aligns public safety, public health, public works, transportation, housing, communications, and social services under a shared coordination structure. During incidents, unified command structures enable synchronized decision-making, while continuity of operations planning sustains essential services. Post-incident, coordinated

recovery strategies integrate infrastructure restoration, economic stabilization, and community resilience initiatives. By institutionalizing collaboration, clear accountability, and shared situational awareness, The City enhances agility, reduces duplication of efforts, and builds public trust in its capacity to manage complex emergencies.

Enhanced Communication Strategy

The City deployed a deliberate strategy of sharing information frequently, consistently, and across multiple platforms to ensure the public received, understood, and trusted official guidance during the weather events. Rather than limiting updates to major developments, officials provided regular situation reports, clear instructions, rumor control messaging, and repeated safety reminders through press briefings, social media, alert systems, and partner networks. The goal is to reduce confusion, counter misinformation, and reach diverse audiences—even at the risk of repeating messages—so that critical information is not missed. In high-stress situations where conditions evolve rapidly, over-communication strengthens transparency, reinforces credibility, and supports informed decision-making by residents and stakeholders.

Stakeholder Engagement Map

EOC briefings and situation reports were shared with over 120 internal and external stakeholders. Stakeholders included representation from:

- Mayor
- City Council
- Chief Administrative Officer
- City Departments
    - Animal Care & Control
    - Citizen Services and Response/311
    - Economic Development
    - Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response
    - Finance
    - Fire
    - General Services
    - Housing and Community Development
    - Human Resources
    - Information Technology
    - Intergovernmental Affairs
    - Justice Services
    - Minority Business
    - Neighborhood and Community Services
    - Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities
    - Planning
    - Police
    - Procurement
    - Public Library
    - Public Utilities
    - Public Works

    - Sheriff
    - Social Services
    - Strategic Communications
    - Sustainability
- External Stakeholders
    - Ambulance Authority
    - Behavioral Health Authority
    - Chesterfield County
    - Comcast/XFINITY
    - Courts System
    - Dominion Energy
    - Greater Richmond Transit Company
    - Hanover County
    - Henrico County
    - Richmond City Health District/Virginia Department of Health
    - Richmond Public Schools
    - Virginia Commonwealth University
    - Virginia Department of Emergency Management
    - Regional partner localities (optional)

II. Winter Storm Timeline: Compound Event

A. Forecast & Escalation: Fern & Gianna

DTN Forecast Evolution

Total snowfall/ice accumulation: 3 to 8 inches
The National Weather Service reported a combined total snowfall accumulation in the Richmond Area of 3 to 8 inches, depending on the location. Total ice accumulation was .3 to .85 inches, depending on location.

Duration of storm system:
There were two distinct winter weather systems:

- **Fern:** January 23-26
- **Gianna:** January 31-February 1

Peak wind speeds: 24 mph sustained, 35 mph gusts (January 26)
Lowest recorded temperatures: 9 degrees (January 29)

Number and type of National Weather Service (NWS) alerts issued: 8 total advisories

- 2 Cold Weather Advisories
- 1 Extreme Cold Weather Watch
- 3 Winter Weather Advisories
- 2 Winter Storm Warnings

Notable Storm Phases

January 19: Initial notification of potential Winter Storm. Initial snowfall estimate is approximately 18-20 inches.
January 20-23: Forecast gradually calls for less snow, but more ice as system trends north.
January 24-26: Storm passes through Saturday into Sunday with all snow initially, before changing to a mixture of ice and snow, sleet and finally freezing rain.
January 26-29: Temperatures drop sharply behind the system, leading to persistent freezing conditions after precipitation ends. Given the temperatures, most road treatment and plowing prove ineffective.
January 28-30: Temperatures briefly rise above freezing for an hour or two on January 28 but quickly dip back down below freezing overnight. Freezing temperatures create smooth sheets of ice on streets, sidewalks, backyards, and parking lots as the water re-freezes (i.e. the Zamboni effect). High temperatures never reach above freezing for the rest of the month.
January 31: Winter storm Gianna rapidly intensifies into a bomb cyclone as it tracks up the coast, with the first impacts felt in Richmond January 31st into February 1st. Despite an early dire warning of 6-8 inches of snow, little to no snow falls on the Richmond area during this event.
February 1-2: Bitter cold returns to the area, making the continued cleanup from the previous storm difficult and refreezing ice-covered areas as the temperatures vacillate between above and below freezing.

Training for possible water rescues on icy surfaces.

B. Emergency Activations

State of Emergency Declarations

- State Declaration (Fern, and continued for Gianna): January 22
- Local Declaration (Fern): January 23
- Local Declaration (Gianna): January 30
- All the regional localities declared a state of emergency (approximately January 24)
- The Mayor's local emergency declarations were affirmed by City Council on February 9, 2026, and rescinded at the same meeting.

Additional information and guidance to staff regarding service delivery and associated requirements for the emergency declarations were distributed on January 28, and updated on January 30 and February 2.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Activation

- January 21: Enhanced/Monitoring
- January 24: In-person activation (hybrid: MACC and virtual)
- January 28: Hybrid, pm enhanced monitoring
- January 30: Activation (virtual only)
- February 1: Demobilization of EOC, normal operations

A total of 45 coordination briefings were conducted throughout the two winter events, including policy group meetings and sheltering coordination. Amongst these briefings were 13 Full EOC Briefings that included a large representation from internal and external city stakeholders.

Key Operational Objectives

(Shared from the EOC's Coordinated Action Plan)

- Maintain situational awareness of weather conditions and impacts across the city.
- Support roadway treatment and clearance operations to reduce transportation hazards.
- Ensure continuity of critical City services and infrastructure.
- Protect life and safety, with particular focus on vulnerable populations.
- Coordinate consistent and timely public information and messaging.
- Provide decision support to the Mayor, CAO and Policy Group as conditions evolve.

Multi-Agency Coordination Center Activation

The Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC) provides a facility for coordination and synchronization across city agencies, allowing for information synthesis and alignment. The facility's technology capabilities allow for a common operating picture, allowing for executive-level situational awareness fostering a decision-support environment. For more information about the MACC's purpose, please review Section III-A.

Though smaller snow events can be effectively managed using the Virtual EOC concept, forecasts in the days and hours leading up to this event used terms such as "historic snowfall" and "catastrophic impacts" to Central Virginia which required a more robust coordination approach. Using a Hybrid EOC model, key response agencies had an in-person presence in the MACC, while emergency support agencies participated remotely. This model was chosen so that in the event of widespread electrical power, telecommunications outages, and/or completely impassable road conditions, core decision leaders were present in-person at the MACC to ensure the seamless coordination of the city emergency response operations.

C. Active Response During Fern

24-hour Operations (Emergency Sheltering and Extreme Weather Warming Centers)

In addition to public safety and utilities—agencies that always maintain a 24-hour employee presence—additional services implemented 24-hour operations throughout the event. Road treatment and plowing, sheltering operations, strategic communications, and the MACC operated 24 hours throughout the event to ensure non-stop emergency response.

Overnight Staffing

Most response agencies worked in 12-hour operational periods. Most agencies provided hoteling for some employees to optimize rest during off time, ensure employee safety, and reduce drive time considering the hazardous road conditions.

Regional Coordination and Alignment

Because Winter Storms Fern and Gianna impacted the entire Central Virginia region, the City prioritized structured regional coordination throughout both events. Regional emergency management partners were invited to participate in City situation briefings to ensure shared situational awareness regarding roadway conditions, shelter capacity, material usage, and operational adjustments. Localities, school systems, and the court system coordinated on closures and closure announcements through the event.

The Chief Administrative Officer also participated in regular calls with regional locality administrators to align executive-level decision-making, public messaging, procurement pressures, and recovery timelines. Emergency Managers maintained continuous communication to share forecast updates and emerging operational challenges.

This deliberate coordination minimized duplication of effort, reduced conflicting messaging, and strengthened regional alignment during a prolonged and atypical winter event.

Power Continuity and Restoration

Both Dominion Energy and Comcast provided robust in-person presentations related to expected outages, timing, and severity of Winter Storm Fern during pre-storm reporting sessions. Initially, the greatest concern was ice accumulation greater than 0.25 inches, which would have caused extensive damage to trees, power lines, and utility poles. In the initial planning, power restoration was prioritized for hospitals, schools, water treatment facilities, and other critical community services.

Changes to the forecast meant that Richmond did not experience the widespread outages predicted early in the weather event, but the City remained in close coordination with energy providers to respond to any reported outages. On Tuesday, January 27, City of Richmond worked closely with Dominion Energy crews to address an outage in the Highland Park area caused by the extreme cold weather. Approximately 167 customers were affected. Dominion crews worked as safely and quickly as possible to restore power and ensure reliability in the area. Power was restored shortly after 10pm local time.

Outside of the above outage, the highest number of customers without power reported by Dominion to the EOC was 78 customers on January 27 at 8:50 a.m.

D. Active Response During Gianna

The Department of Public Works continued 24-hour operations between Winter Storms Fern and Gianna. Emergency Operations Center activities transitioned to fully virtual coordination, with an on-duty Emergency Manager monitoring overnight response operations. Emergency Sheltering operations resumed with the new winter storm, while planning remained underway for a sustainable model for vulnerable populations and for a transition into that model.

III. Emergency Coordination Governance

A. Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC)

Role, Function, and Cross-department Integration

The City's Multi-Agency Coordination Center was placed into service in January 2026. The first activation of this new tool was during the gubernatorial inauguration on January 17. Though the City had historically not activated the emergency operations plan for this event, it provided an opportunity to test the new MACC facility and technology. Lessons learned from this initial activation to support the inauguration proved beneficial, in that it made the MACC more operationally ready for the winter weather event that occurred in the following week.

The MACC addresses recommendations issued by Hagerty Consulting in the Incident Response Assessment from January 2025, in that the facility creates a permanent space that is ready at a moment's notice for emergency coordination. It addresses many of the command, coordination, and communications gaps outlined in that report.

> "Emergencies compress time, elevate risk, and expose the seams of traditional organizational structures. In those moments, innovation is not about new technology alone; it is about creating the conditions for better decision-making under pressure. The MACC was built with that principle in mind.
>
> The MACC provides more than a physical space; it creates an operational environment where departments move from parallel action to synchronized execution. It enables immediate problem-solving across silos, which shortens decision cycles. It also accelerates resource alignment and strengthens accountability by ensuring that strategy and execution occur in the same room. On top of all that, it also provides a platform for learning—capturing real-time adjustments and embedding those lessons into future operations.
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> During Winter Storms Fern and Gianna, the hybrid MACC model allowed core leadership to remain physically present while leveraging virtual connectivity for broader agency participation—ensuring continuity even amid the threat of power or telecommunications disruption.
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> In building the MACC, the City invested not only in infrastructure, but in a culture of coordinated resilience. The storms tested that investment, and the facility demonstrated its value as a central coordination hub that will continue to expand in capability as the City's needs evolve."
>
> **Al Wiggins |** Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of Operations

B. Regional Coordination

Inter-jurisdictional Alignment

Beginning January 24, Locality Administrators met daily until the winter weather event ended. In addition, locality Emergency Managers had a regular communication chain coordinating and sharing information across jurisdictions.

Decision Synchronization

Decision synchronization during Winter Storm Fern was achieved through structured, recurring engagement at both the executive and operational levels across the region. Beginning January 24, Locality Administrators convened daily coordination calls at 9:00 a.m., while peer Emergency Managers conducted standing 10:00 a.m. check-ins to align on forecast updates, operating status decisions, shelter capacity, school closures, and infrastructure impacts. These forums ensured that major operational determinations—such as delayed openings, building closures, court cancellations, and emergency declaration actions—were made with an awareness of regional posture and downstream impacts.

The Chief Administrative Officer actively participated in these regional executive calls to align decision-making related to procurement pressures, fiscal coordination, service delivery adjustments, and public messaging. In parallel, the City invited regional partners—including Dominion Energy, Comcast/XFINITY, VDH, VDEM, and neighboring localities—to participate in MACC and EOC briefings, enabling real-time intelligence sharing and infrastructure coordination. This integration ensured high-priority locations were identified collectively, outage restoration expectations were communicated clearly, and sheltering strategies evolved with shared awareness.

As operational conditions shifted, particularly with prolonged freezing temperatures and the transition toward Winter Storm Gianna, regional leaders adjusted meeting cadence, coordinated closure notices, and synchronized shelter adjustments. This deliberate, structured communication minimized conflicting public announcements, reduced duplicative efforts, and ensured that executive-level decisions were informed by a shared regional operating picture rather than an isolated jurisdictional response.

C. Emergency Communications & 311

Call Volume Data

From Friday, January 23, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. through Monday, January 28, 2026, at 7:00 a.m., the Emergency Communications Center (911) answered **2,424 calls**. 95.46% of those calls were answered within 20 seconds or less.

From Saturday, January 31, 2026, thru Monday, February 2, 2026, at 9:00 a.m., the Emergency Communications Center (911) answered **698 calls**. 96.99% of those calls were answered within 20 seconds or less.

Storms-Related Emergency Calls Reported to 911

Jan. 23 - Jan. 28	Calls	Jan. 31 - Feb. 2	Calls	Total
Vehicle Accidents/ Crashes	154	Vehicle Accidents/ Crashes	84	238
Disabled Vehicles	101	Disabled Vehicles	17	118
Watermain Break	5	Watermain Break	6	11
Burst Pipes	7	Burst Pipes	0	7
Wires Down	2	Wires Down	1	3
Sand Requests	61	Sand Requests	29	90

Average Response Times and any Deviations From Normal

Aside from incidents involving a crash, there were no reported weather-related rescues performed.

RVA311 Call Volume

RVA311 enabled storm-related call tracking by implementing a unique call wrap code beginning on January 29, 2026. Using this identifier, agents recorded 263 calls related to Winter Storms Fern and Gianna between January 29 and early February 2026.

During the storm response period, RVA311 received the following total call volumes across all service categories:
January 24 – January 31, 2026: 3,697 calls
February 1 – February 7, 2026: 4,782 calls

These totals reflected both storm-related and non-storm-related customer contacts.

RVA311 Enhancements

In preparation for and during the winter storm events, RVA311 implemented several system enhancements to improve customer access to information and support operational tracking:

On January 23, 2026, RVA311 enabled an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) feature allowing callers to check inclement weather shelter availability 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
On January 29, 2026, RVA311 implemented a storm-specific call wrap code to consistently identify and track customer calls related to Winter Storms Fern and Gianna. This enhancement supported improved reporting and post-event analysis of storm-related service demand.

"Winter weather disrupts some things but not all. Our residents reach out to RVA311 during weather events for both routine needs and more acute, weather-related concerns. 311 staff know we're speaking with residents who may feel confused, frustrated, or vulnerable, and so our goal is to provide reliable information and clear next steps, whether the need is weather related or not. Our new call wrap code and Voice Response option helped residents connect with information more quickly and leadership to track storm related calls."

Pete Breil | Director of Citizen Service and Response (RVA311)

Richmond Police (RPD)

From Saturday, January 24, 2026, to Monday, February 2, 2026, Police received 131 requests to check on the welfare of an individual. It is unknown how many of these requests were weather related. RPD also documented fewer traffic crashes than estimated, suggesting the effectiveness of public messaging encouraging residents to remain at home. Aside from incidents involving a crash, there were no reported weather-related rescues performed.

The Police Department implemented plans to allow call downgrading and the doubling of officers to reduce the number of vehicles out. They also offered transportation to officers without 4 -wheel drive vehicles. Throughout both events, police monitored any road conditions that would dictate restrictions to Priority 1 & 2 calls only.

Police also continued to monitor for possible pop-up protests in the City related to events in Minnesota.

Richmond Fire (RFD)

Richmond Fire Department responded to multiple structure fires throughout the winter weather event.

During both weather events, RFD experienced a higher call volume than normal for working fires. RFD provided extra units to support the transportation staff and worked closely with City communications to ramp up messaging on generator and fire safety to increase public awareness of home heating risks during winter weather.

Ten carbon monoxide alarms were received from January 24, 2026, through February 2, 2026. Most of the alarms were deemed to be false after testing the system or replacing batteries. There were no reported illnesses or injuries. Additional significant events included the following:

- 1 2-alarm fire
- 7 structure fires
- 2 apartment fires
- 1 Elevator rescue
- Vehicle accident with entrapment

Richmond Ambulance Authority

During the peak of the storm, patients were taken to the closest, most appropriate facility (aka modified response). RAA also responded to lift assist requests during a temporary period of high RFD call volume. RAA documented 78 responses within the first 36 hours of the event, followed by a sharp uptick to 140 calls during the following 24 hours.

Richmond Fire Department responded to multiple structure fires throughout the winter weather event.

Sheriff's Office and the Department of Justice Services

The Richmond City Sheriff's Office (RCSO) provided 2 deputies on a 24-hour basis from the activation through the deactivation of the City's Emergency Shelter operations. RCSO held the primary role in providing security at the emergency shelter but coordinated with staff from Richmond Parks and Recreation and Social Services.

The office also provided transportation support, using 4-wheel drive vehicles to transport staff for operations at the Emergency Shelter, the Richmond City Justice Center jail facility, and the Richmond juvenile detention facility. Staff requested transport through the EOC, and drivers created planned routes to ensure the efficient pick up and drop off of essential staff.

The Department of Justice Services (DJS) reports that operations continued without disruption across Juvenile Detention, Pretrial, Probation, and related programs.

Public Messaging

In his role as Mayor, Dr. Danny Avula assumed the vital task of representing the City as primary spokesperson with various surrogates, including DPW and Fire. Key messaging included snow removal updates; public safety messaging connected to home heating, shoveling, and safety during ice storms; and emergency readiness.

Emergency alerts issued across all platforms: 40. Note that not all residents receive all alerts.

Two press briefings occurred throughout the weather events, one on January 22, and one on January 31.

Public engagement metrics on social media:
24 posts (on both Instagram and Facebook)

- 901k views on Instagram
- 703k views on Facebook
- 14k interactions on Instagram
- 3k interactions on Facebook

Mayor Danny Avula, CAO Odie Donald, and other City leadership participate in a press conference on January 31 to update residents on the City's actions.

The Office of Strategic Communications created a landing page (go.rva.gov/winterweather) for all winter weather-related updates, including snow removal progress, shelter status, and public safety messaging.

Nearly all press releases and social media content was translated into Spanish and released alongside the English versions.

rvagov

Snow and ice can make sidewalks unsafe for neighbors, mail carriers, and pedestrians. If you're able, please clear your sidewalks and help keep our community safe.

Need help or know someone who does? Consider lending a hand or checking in with a neighbor. Together, we can make winter a little easier for everyone. Learn more about snow removal by visiting rva.gov/public-works/snow-removal.

Stay safe, Richmond!

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La nieve y el hielo pueden hacer que las aceras sean inseguras para nuestros vecinos, el personal del correo y otros peatones. Si puedes, por favor limpia las aceras frente a tu hogar y ayuda a mantener nuestra comunidad segura.

¿Necesitas, o conoces a alguien que necesita ayuda? Considera preguntar a tus vecinos y brindarles una mano si la necesitan. Juntos, podemos hacer que el invierno sea un poco más fácil para todos. Para más información sobre la remoción de nieve, visita rva.gov/public-works/snow-removal.

¡Cuídense mucho, Richmond!

Public messaging reminded residents of personal responsibility for sidewalk shoveling and provided safety information about shoveling.

Responding to our Partners on Council

As City Council member received constituent calls, primarily related to snow and ice removal, they were routed to the CAO and Mayor for resolution of customer concerns. The administration activated the Office of Neighborhood Engagement team to provide additional constituent follow-up.

IV. Protecting Vulnerable Residents

A. Shelter & Warming Center Operations

Sheltering

The Department of Social Services (DSS) is the lead agency responsible for the development of a comprehensive shelter program, operating in partnership with the City of Richmond's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and supported by voluntary agencies operating in and around the city's geographical boundaries.

To ensure cohesiveness and unity in Emergency Shelter Operations, volunteers and agency representatives in the City of Richmond are organized into an Emergency Shelter Team. Together, this Team trains and participates in Emergency Shelter exercises throughout the year to build unit cohesiveness, increase readiness, and improve their collective expertise.

Personnel, both city staff and volunteers, who serve as Emergency Shelter staff must complete a Criminal Background Check. Following completion of their background check, they are assigned to the Shelter Team.

Emergency Shelter Operations are organized in a phased planning approach –Preparation, Notification and Action, Response and Recovery.

Winter Storms Fern and Gianna: Preparation

The emergency shelter teams are comprised primarily of employees of Richmond Department of Social Services (RDSS). The team is supported by the Departments of Parks and Recreation and Community Facilities (PRCF), the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts (RHHD), Richmond Sheriff's Office (RSO), Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA), Neighborhoods and Community Services (NCS), Human Services, Richmond Animal Care and Control (RACC) and Volunteer Community Emergency Team Members (CERT).

Notification and Activation

RDSS Shelter Teams are on a monthly shelter coverage schedule. On January 22, 2026, the January On-Call Emergency Shelter Team was activated, and the December Team was placed on standby in response to Winter Storm Fern. DSS leadership laid out the plan for the Emergency Shelter Activation and Emergency Operation Center coverage. The locations of the emergency shelters were identified: Southside Community Center (primary) and Luck's Field (Overflow). DSS leadership finalized the Emergency Operations Center staffing plan with the expectation that those covering the overnight shift would remain at the MACC in City Hall for the duration of the activation.

On January 23, 2026, DSS leadership held a mandatory shelter status meeting with staff (activated and standby) to discuss logistics, set expectations, and answer questions. DSS, PRCF and OEM met to set up the shelter at Southside Community Center and stage supplies for possible setup at Luck's Field.

Southside Community Center prepared to welcome residents ahead of its Emergency Welcome Center activation.

DSS staff arrived at the Southside Community Center on Saturday, January 23, at 3:00 p.m. to complete setup for a 5:00 p.m. opening of the emergency shelter. Staff for all shelter shifts arrived at 3:00 p.m., with the anticipation that due to weather conditions, they would not be able to return home for 48 hours at a minimum. The shelter was set up to accommodate staff and guests for the duration of the event.

Richmond Animal Control and Care established the process for emergency boarding situations for emergency shelter guests and staff. There were two DSS staff members that boarded their pets with RACC.

Partnership

Homeward's service coordination team began working

with shelter and outreach workers to do as much work in advance of the weather to ensure that people could safely access resources. Jen Johnson and Choice East worked with shelter partners to expedite any possible shelter intakes (and exits to safe housing.) They met with both healthcare and outreach partners. They also engaged their

organizational listserv to reach a broad audience for sharing information and learning what other community partners were prioritizing.

Response

At 5:00 p.m. on January 24, 2026, the Emergency Shelter at Southside Community Center was open and prepared to receive guests. Meals were ordered and supporting agencies were present as well. Most DSS Staff deployed remained on site throughout duration of operation due to harsh travel conditions.

The following organizations supported the Emergency Shelter Operations:

- Sheriff's Office: 3 shifts per 24-hour period/2 personnel
- Richmond and Henrico Health Districts: 2 shifts per 24-hour period/2 personnel
- Richmond Parks and Recreation: multiple personnel throughout 24-hour period. Some dates included on-site support for a 24-hour period, and some coverage was on-call as necessary for overnight hours of operation. Also included were maintenance and janitorial deployed during the second operational period for Winter Storm Gianna (01/30/26 to 02/02/26). Parks and Recreation staff also remained on site for demobilization during both operational periods.
- Ashbritt (Contracted support): Four Ashbritt personnel were on site for two 8-hour shifts daily starting with second operational period (01/30/26 to 02/02/26).
- Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (deployment times varied)
- Neighborhoods and Community Services' Office of Homeless Services: Deployment times varied.
- Medical Reserve Corps: Deployment times varied

Mayor Danny Avula visits with Emergency Shelter staff.

Meals Served During the Winter Storm Events

The shelter team was prepared to serve 120 individuals per mealtime. There were a variety of snacks available each day for the entirety of the day. At each de-activation, shelter guests were provided with to-go snacks and resource information.

During shelter activation, the City was notified by the Virginia Department of Health-Richmond Henrico Health District (VDH-RHHD), that the catering vendor that served dinner on Sunday, January 25, 2026, at the Emergency Shelter did not have a VDH-RHHD permit for food service. The vendor was notified immediately and contacted VDH to acquire the food service permit. No illnesses were reported after the meal. VDH-RHHD nursing staff were a part of the shelter staffing and continued onsite until deactivation. The Department of Social Services Staff updated food service protocols as follows:

1. Staff will submit the current vendor list and any new vendors to VDH for confirmation that each vendor has a food service permit.
2. When procuring food service, staff now require vendors to provide a copy of their valid food service permit, as VDH can only view those permitted in Richmond and Henrico. This is especially important if an emergency impact requires that food services be procured outside of city limits.

Post-Event Recovery

For both winter storms, guests were notified about the planned deactivation of the Emergency Shelter the day before the deactivation itself. They were provided with the option of transitioning to the City's Warming Centers. Transportation to the Warming Centers were coordinated by NCS with GRTC. There was also coordination with faith-based organizations to assist. DSS and NCS worked with the Office of Strategic Communications to ensure this information was clearly communicated to the public and partner agencies.

Once guest departure was completed, the shelter teams and Parks and Rec staff worked to restore the facility to its previous occupancy condition:

- Cleaning services were procured to ensure a deep sanitization of the facility.
- An asset inventory was completed to determine items needing replacement.
- Surplus snacks were inventoried and transitioned to the Warming Center for usage.

DSS at Work

"Leading the Richmond Social Services team during the recent storm events reaffirmed why I chose this work. Our staff served with compassion, grade, and kindness—even in moments of deep fatigue. I witnessed team members stay beyond their required shifts and consistently treat every individual with dignity and respect, all while being away from their own families.

I also observed City agencies and our partner organizations stepping up time and again, offering support in any way possible and stretching limited resources to ensure we could serve those made vulnerable by the storm conditions with excellence. This was especially remarkable given that we had not opened an emergency shelter in more than five years. Many DSS staff had never worked in a shelter environment before, yet watching them in action, you would never have known it.

Together, these efforts demonstrated the resilience, professionalism, and deep compassion that define this team and our partners. I am profoundly grateful for everyone's dedication and proud of the collective commitment to safeguarding our community when it mattered most."

Shunda Giles | Director of Social Services

Warming Centers

Event Period: January 28 – February 15, 2026

- **Coordinated cold-weather response:** DNCS activated shelter and warming operations in response to prolonged freezing temperatures, and the intermittent snow, sleet, and freezing rain that created persistent ice and hazardous conditions across Richmond. Extended sub-freezing temperatures required sustained operational readiness beyond initial precipitation events.
- **Focused outreach to vulnerable populations:** DNCS prioritized protection of residents most at risk, including individuals experiencing homelessness, older adults, people with disabilities, immigrant and refugee communities, and families with school-aged children. Staff coordinated with service providers, schools, and community partners to monitor needs, share information, and connect residents to available resources.
- **Transportation and access:** Up to three transportation routes operated nightly to ensure residents could safely access shelter and warming locations despite icy and hazardous travel conditions.
- **Strong regional partnerships:** DNCS coordinated closely with CARITAS, the Salvation Army, GRTC, Blue Sky Fund, and other nonprofit partners to provide shelter, transportation, staffing, and meals. These partnerships ensured continuity of care and minimized service gaps during extended cold weather conditions.
- **Sustained support beyond peak activation:** Even after warming center demobilization, core shelter operations continued serving approximately 105 to 106 residents nightly, reflecting ongoing community need following prolonged freezing temperatures and persistent ice.
- **Operational readiness and coordination:** Coordination with the Emergency Operations Center and community partners supported situational awareness, resource alignment, and timely communication throughout the activation period.
- **Outcome:** DNCS's coordinated, partner-driven response ensured that vulnerable residents had safe shelter, transportation, and access to critical resources during a prolonged period of freezing and hazardous winter conditions.

Facilities Opened

Emergency Shelter Location: Southside Community Center
Fern Activated: January 24 at 5:00 p.m.
Fern Deactivated: January 28, after breakfast
Gianna Activation: January 30 at 3:00 p.m.
Gianna Deactivation: February 2, after breakfast

Expansion of Warming Center Concept

For the first time, the City began to operate public facilities as warming centers during normal operating hours. This model has received national recognition for expanded emergency services, notably in Washington, DC, Baltimore, and Atlanta. In Richmond, the Main Library opened at 9 a.m. on Jan. 28, 2026, serving as a warm place for Richmonders during the winter weather event. The City also operated an evening warming center option at the Linwood Robinson Senior Center (700 N. 26th Street).

Utilization Data

Emergency shelter operations and total occupancy (DSS)

Storm	# of Employees	# of Guests	Partners
Fern	**52**	84	**84**
Giana	**65**	80	**80**
Total Head Count	**117**	164	**164**

DNCS and partners served a total of **2,350 resident stays across 11 activation days**. During peak activation (February 1–9), between **214 and 251 residents were served nightly**, averaging **238 individuals**, with a peak of **251 residents in one night**. Shelter populations ranged between **181 and 192 individuals nightly**, and warming centers provided critical overflow capacity, **serving 12 to 37 individuals per site per night**.

Standby Shelter (Lucks Field)

Cots, blankets, and other necessary supplies were pre-positioned at Lucks Field Community Center. This location was supplied in the event the Southside Community Center Emergency Shelter got to 90% capacity and additional emergency sheltering was needed.

"No One Turned Away" Service Commitment

A "no one turned away" approach to inclement weather sheltering is a life-safety–driven policy in which a local government and its partners commit to providing temporary refuge to any individual seeking protection from dangerous weather conditions, regardless of circumstances such as residency status, identification, or shelter capacity thresholds. Grounded in humanitarian principles and risk reduction, this model prioritizes immediate access to warmth and safety during extreme cold, heat, or severe storms, often expanding beyond traditional shelter eligibility rules and activating overflow sites, faith-based facilities, or community centers as needed. By removing barriers to entry and emphasizing coordinated outreach, transportation assistance, and basic services, the approach reduces exposure-related injuries and fatalities while reinforcing the government's commitment to protecting its most vulnerable populations during hazardous weather events.

Going the Extra Mile

"Throughout the extreme weather storms and ice that followed, our human services team ensured there was additional capacity in our emergency shelters and extreme weather warming centers 24 hours a day for 17 straight days. This involved human services, food, cots and blankets, transportation, and navigation services. We had capacity for everyone who needed a warm place to be throughout the entire event."

Amy Popovich | DCAO, Human Services

V. Infrastructure & Field Operations

A. Department of Public Utilities (DPU)

Service Continuity during the 2026 Compound Event

Across all utilities, DPU ramped up on-site staffing and on-call staffing. Full staffing levels were implemented during both winter storms for the water treatment plant and the operations center, which includes the gas and water technicians and the water distribution team. Ahead of the winter weather event, Virginia Department of Health staff visited the water treatment plan to observe readiness.

Chemicals were delivered and topped off at both water and wastewater plants. The call center operated during normal business hours, and continued 24/7 operations for emergencies. Stormwater maintenance crews also continued to support DPW with plowing and sanding.

During the weather event, 11 water main breaks were reported to the Emergency Communications Center.

Crews prioritized plowing near entries to critical infrastructure, like the water treatment plant and 911 communications centers.

Infrastructure Improvements

There have been many major infrastructure improvements at the water treatment plant in the last year, most notably the completion of the switchgear project. The project includes the newly installed and fully tested Automatic Transfer Switch and serves as an automatic tertiary backup power source. Other improvements include:

- Upgrades to SCADA and filter uninterruptible power supply (UPS) systems to increase runtime capacity
- Replacement and repair of filter effluent valves
- Ongoing integration of backup generators
- Repair of leaks and construction of additional secondary containment
- Redesign of overflow pumping systems
- Replacement or repair of finished water pumps
- Year-round operation in the "summer" electrical mode, which provides two power feeds. This change was permanently established in July 2025.

"Over the last year, the Department of Public Utilities has improved our operations and made significant investments in our water, wastewater, stormwater, and gas systems. These investments have shown that our systems can be resilient and that our staff are prepared for emergency operations and response. Witnessing these responses in action just a year after our water outage is a reminder that systems are better and that we need to keep prioritizing these investments and best practices to ensure we continue to improve and provide high-quality services to our customers."

Scott Morris | Director of Public Utilities

B. Department of Public Works (DPW)

Operational Overview and Preparation

The Department of Public Works is responsible for more than 2,500 lane miles of public roadways. In accordance with the DPW Winter Storm Manual 2025-2026 **(Resolution No. 2004-R143-154)**, storm preparations for Winter Storm Fern began on Wednesday January 21, 2026. Preparations started with a notification to personnel of the department's intent to fully activate its winter maintenance program on January 22, 2026. However, partial activation activities started on Wednesday, January 21, with pre-treating of Priority 1 and Priority 2 roadways in anticipation of 4-8 inches of snow starting Saturday, January 24, and continuing into Sunday January 25.

With a predicted 80% chance of moderate impacts (6 inches or more), DPW secured contractors before the start of the storm, an essential step for avoiding competition with other jurisdictions. DPU was able to secure 27 contracted personnel and equipment assets that included 20 trucks with plows and spreaders and several front-end loaders to assist with snow piles in the Central Business District. Additional engineering staff were selected to support the department in the Multi Agency Command Center (MACC) to assist with communications, logistics, updates, and overall coordination efforts with other departments and agencies.

Prior to the start of the storm, staff inventoried equipment and materials. DPW also confirmed its responsibilities with schools and other key agencies and stakeholders. These discussions confirmed priorities, including ensuring the roads leading to the water treatment plant were cleared, road closures were communicated promptly, and key facilities such as warming shelters and fire stations could be supported throughout the storm. Understanding that this could be a prolonged recovery effort, DPW also secured 40 hotel rooms for over 100 individuals who were involved in the snow program.

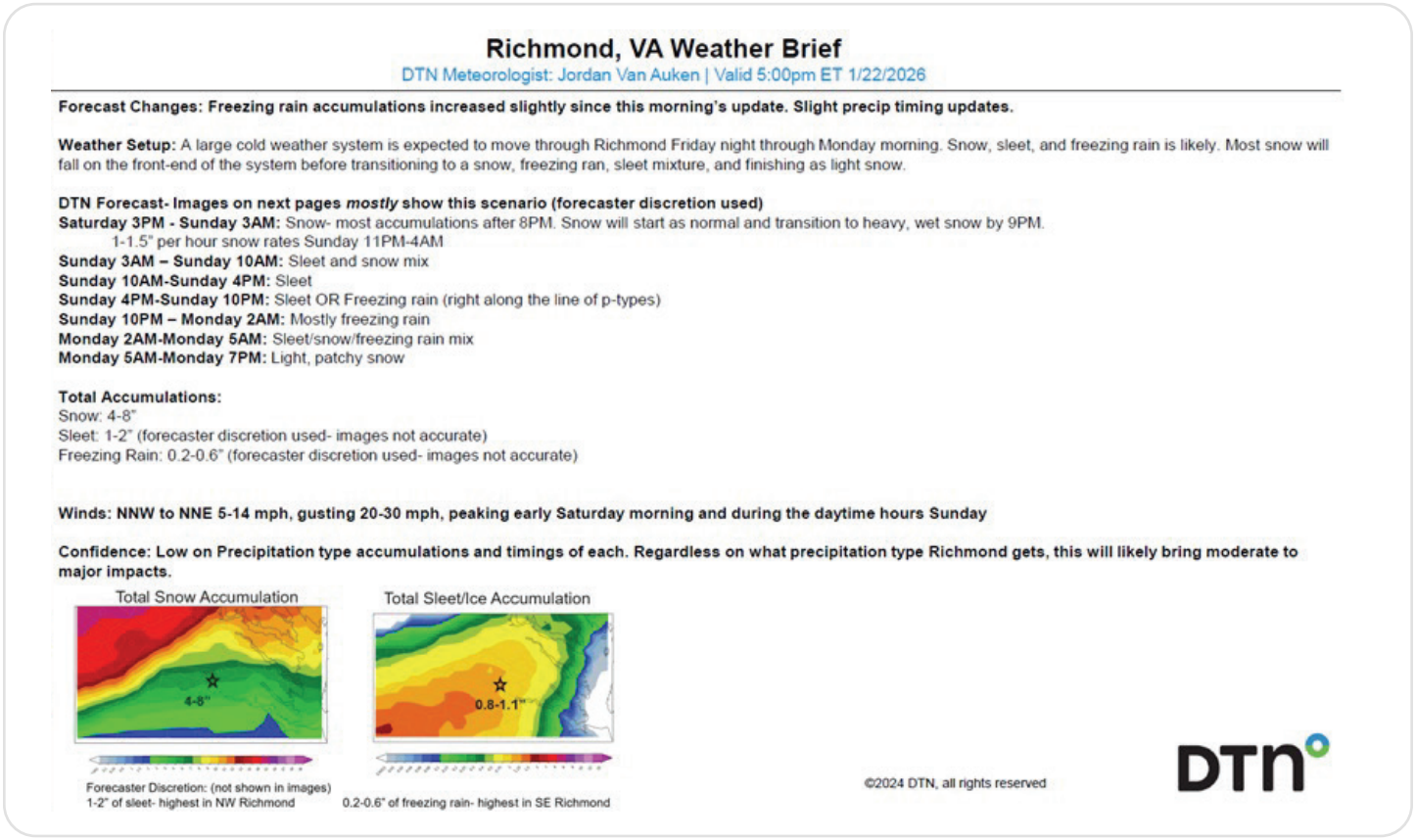
Below are highlighted resources that were activated before the start of Winter Storm Fern:

- 6,000 tons of salt
- 2,000 tons salt/sand mix
- 5,000 gallons of liquid brine
- 80 trucks including contractors
- 240 assigned personnel
- 40 Hotel rooms

- Two P-cards activated for emergency purchases
- Vendors secured to supply meals for personnel throughout the weekend

Snow Program Safety Meeting 1-24-2026

Snow removal crews meet ahead of a shift.



Richmond, VA Weather Brief

DTN Meteorologist: Jordan Van Auken | Valid 5:00pm ET 1/22/2026

Forecast Changes: Freezing rain accumulations increased slightly since this morning's update. Slight precip timing updates.

Weather Setup: A large cold weather system is expected to move through Richmond Friday night through Monday morning. Snow, sleet, and freezing rain is likely. Most snow will fall on the front-end of the system before transitioning to a snow, freezing ran, sleet mixture, and finishing as light snow.

DTN Forecast- Images on next pages *mostly* show this scenario (forecaster discretion used)
Saturday 3PM - Sunday 3AM: Snow- most accumulations after 8PM. Snow will start as normal and transition to heavy, wet snow by 9PM.
1-1.5" per hour snow rates Sunday 11PM-4AM
Sunday 3AM – Sunday 10AM: Sleet and snow mix
Sunday 10AM-Sunday 4PM: Sleet
Sunday 4PM-Sunday 10PM: Sleet OR Freezing rain (right along the line of p-types)
Sunday 10PM – Monday 2AM: Mostly freezing rain
Monday 2AM-Monday 5AM: Sleet/snow/freezing rain mix
Monday 5AM-Monday 7PM: Light, patchy snow

Total Accumulations:
Snow: 4-8"
Sleet: 1-2" (forecaster discretion used- images not accurate)
Freezing Rain: 0.2-0.6" (forecaster discretion used- images not accurate)

Winds: NNW to NNE 5-14 mph, gusting 20-30 mph, peaking early Saturday morning and during the daytime hours Sunday

Confidence: Low on Precipitation type accumulations and timings of each. Regardless on what precipitation type Richmond gets, this will likely bring moderate to major impacts.

Total Snow Accumulation

Forecaster Discretion: (not shown in images)
1-2" of sleet- highest in NW Richmond

Total Sleet/Ice Accumulation

0.2-0.6" of freezing rain- highest in SE Richmond

DTN

Pre-treatment Strategy

Based upon the January 22 forecast shown above, winter weather response entered a full snow program activation of two 12-hour shifts on Friday, January 23. Activation included 240 field personnel.

Anti-icing and pre-treatment activities had already begun on Wednesday, January 21, with a "Bridge Crew." During that time, 20 trucks spread salt and a liquid brine on bridges overpasses and Priority 1 roadways. On Thursday, January 22, the bridge crews continued the treatment into Priority 2 roadways, and upon full activation (Friday) the pre-

treatment efforts were able to complete approximately 80% of the priority 1 and 2 roadways. Therefore, Friday night and Saturday morning staff were able to pre-treat some neighborhoods and Priority 3 roadways prior to the start of the storm. 20 contracted trucks with spreaders and plows were also delegated to support Richmond Public Schools with their parking lots on Saturday, January 24.

Knowing the pre-treatment of roads would be a vital part of recovery from this storm event, DPW set a goal to pre-treat all Priority 1 and 2 roadways by the A shift (7 a.m. to 8 p.m.) on Friday, January 23. This goal would allow staff to treat some neighborhood and priority 3 roadways Friday night and into Saturday morning. However, it wasn't until approximately midnight on Friday, January 23 that all the Priority 1 and 2 routes were completed. Staff were then able to start treating Priority 3 roadways prior to the start of the storm.

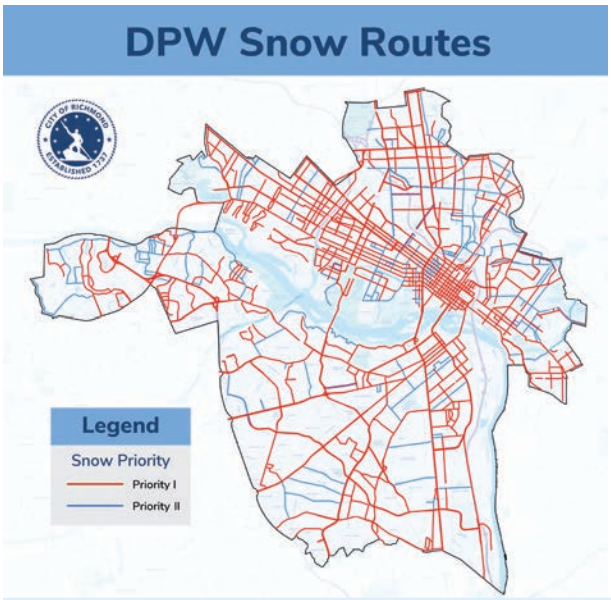
Roads were pre-treated with either salt or a liquid salt brine mixture to prevent the bonding of snow and ice to the roadway surface. However, these chemicals work best when the temperatures reach a sustained above 20 degrees, because temperatures below 20 degrees have a much slower chemical reaction. Temperatures above 20 degrees and the sun's radiant heat are the necessary conditions for thawing and evaporation.

During a storm or when snow starts to accumulate to roughly 3 inches or more, field operations shift to plowing. At that time, pre-treatment stops and plowing continues simultaneously with the spreading of salt and sand to melt snow and add traction. DPW shifted its field operations Saturday afternoon and into the evening. Richmond ultimately received less freezing rain than predicated, but the City also saw lower temperatures than predicted. Because Monday's high temperatures were in the low 20s, the speed of chemical reaction was reduced.

Roadway Prioritization (Priority 1, 2, 3)

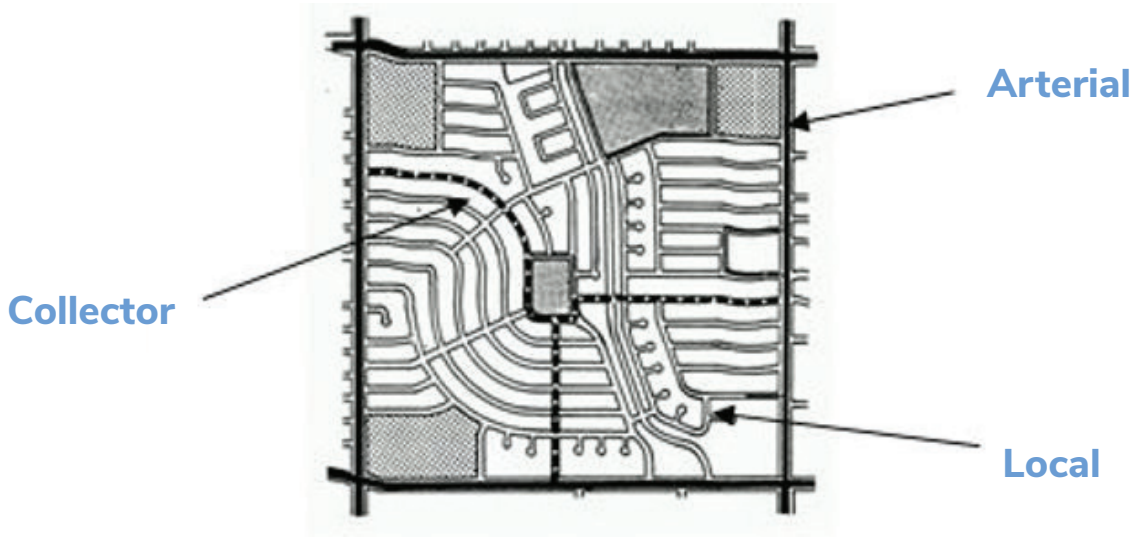
The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) assigns roads a functional classification based on the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) guidance. The Department of Public Works (DPW) follows VDOT guidance and also assigns roads within the city of Richmond a "functional classification." Functional classification groups streets based on the service they provide. VDOT uses four classifications:

1. Principal Arterials, such as interstates and expressways, carry the most cars.
2. Minor arterials are roads that typically lead to interstates and expressways.
3. Collector Streets gather traffic from local or residential streets.
4. Local, residential or neighborhood streets comprise the fourth and final classification.



Snow removal | Richmond

The City of Richmond consists of minor arterials, collectors, and local or residential streets.



DPW's snow protocol refers to minor arterials and collectors as Priority 1 and 2 roadways. The nomenclature is slightly different, as roads may be added to the priority list because they function as primary access for emergency response or may serve a critical need in snow removal operations.

Response Priorities and Actions

- First Priority Primary Snow Routes: Major Arterial Roadways. Initial anti-icing treatment completed up to 24 hours prior to the forecasted event for those routes identified, and within 4 hours for all others with sustained attention; as close to bare pavement as possible on all travel lanes; chains unnecessary and bare pavement on travel lanes as soon as possible after cessation of the snowfall.
- Second Priority Secondary Snow Routes: Collector Streets. Initial treatment completed within 4 hours with chemicals to serve as bond breaker and attention following First Priority snow routes; bare pavement anticipated within 24 hours after cessation of snowfall.
- Third Priority Residential Snow Routes: Local Neighborhood Streets. Treatment only after first and second priority streets are completed; bare pavement not intended; treat with chemicals or abrasives or plow as required to improve traction within 24 to 72 hours after cessation of snowfall. As mentioned above, snow removal and ice control on public roads, streets and bridges is the highest priority for the Department.

Precipitation from Fern ended around 11PM Sunday January 24, at which time Priority 1 and 2 roadways were still being treated and plowed. However, with below freezing temperatures continuing throughout the week, restoring Priority 1 and 2 roadways were prolonged.

Staff entered Priority 3 Residential Streets during B Shift (7 p.m. to 8 a.m.) on Tuesday, January 27, 2026. Chemical spreaders and plows remained in these areas from January 27 until January 30, when forecasts for Gianna required crews to return to pre-treatment for Priority 1 and 2 roadways. With an updated forecast for Gianna, crews were able to conclude pre-treatment and return to neighborhood streets on January 31.

Snow vs. Ice Implications

Prolonged low temperatures severely impacted recovery efforts. It required DPW to remain working on Priority 1 and 2 roadways through A shift (7 a.m. to 8 p.m.) on Thursday, January 29. Low temperatures allowed ice to form and bond on residential streets throughout the region, as VDOT, Henrico County, and Chesterfield were also not able to service neighborhood or residential streets within normal or recommended time frames.

DPW typically applies anti-icing or de-icing agents along with pre-treatments before, during, and after a storm ends. The low temperatures required a focus on de-icing, plowing, and anti-icing on the Priority 1 and 2 roadways. This work used more materials and created a slower response and recovery overall.

When ice forms on a roadway the most effective tool (in the Richmond region) is higher temperatures. Anti-icing and de-icing agents that are applied before and during the storm are much less effective below 20 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, a different operational approach is necessary when temperatures remain freezing. In this case, operations switched back to adding salt and sand on top of the ice; the sand creates traction and the salt will ultimately help melt the ice. Fortunately, during the two-week period of extremely low temperatures no additional precipitation occurred, so operational efforts could be focused on spreading a salt and sand mix over ice that accumulated. The priority 1 and 2 roadways that were then cleared did not require any additional treatment at that time.

The snow accumulation of roughly 3-5 inches was cleared relatively quickly. When snow is accompanied or followed by ice, though, the same roads that originally were plowed will then require a chemical application, which means the same road must be addressed at least two times. When "thick ice" forms, it also creates unsafe traveling conditions for the trucks that spread sand and salt. "Heavy equipment" like front-end loaders with metal blades are then required to break the ice.

"Snow removal operations require both a huge amount of pre-planning and the ability to adapt to the conditions in front of you as they change. Our snow removal season is really year-round; our Winter Maintenance Plan is updated annually to detail employee responsibilities, equipment testing, and material storage, along with how we respond to ice and snow events. With "dry runs" starting in October to assure driver familiarity with their routes, staff is well prepared to cover Richmond roadways during an event. Our goal is always to help get the city back to normalcy as soon as we can.

Crews and contractors entered Winter Storms Fern and Gianna ready to pre-treat our roadways, remove snow, and get Richmonders back on the roads. When the shifting forecast brought us ice and lower than expected temperatures, crews worked around the clock to make progress on sanding and melting treacherous roadways. When I look back at late January and early February, what I'm most grateful for is the dedication of these crews, who confronted rare conditions for Richmond and who stayed committed to our residents throughout 14 days of non-stop operations. I also want to highlight our Solid Waste team, who navigated tough conditions in alleys and streets to collect our communities' trash."

Bobby Vincent | Director of Public Works

Operational Timeline and Adjustments

See below for a brief timeline overview of DPW's response to Winter Storm Fern, including how operations and how operations overlapped into Winter Storm Gianna:

- Friday, January 23: DPW entered a full snow program activation of two 12 hours shifts, which included 240 field personnel.
- Saturday, January 24: 20 contracted trucks with spreaders and plows arrived to assist Richmond Public Schools with their parking lots.
- Monday, January 26: Plowing operations shifted to primarily a spreading/pre-treatment operation as the snow that accumulated on Priority 1 and 2 roadways began to freeze.
- Monday, January 26, and Tuesday, January 27: Some melting occurred, primarily on the Priority 1 and 2 roadways as these were pre-treated with de-icing agents and plowed to remove excess snow accumulation.
- Wednesday, January 28: Based on a forecasted 3-8 inches of snow in the coming weekend, renewed preparations:
    - Pre-treatment of Priority 1 and 2 roadways were pushed to Friday so that staff could continue responding to Fern.
    - Additional contractors were bought onboard.
- Friday, January 30: Full activation for Winter Storm Gianna began.

Throughout continuous operations, 700 lane miles of arterial roadways were treated and/or plowed at least 8 times. 200 lane miles of collectors were treated and/or plowed at least 4 times, and 1000 lane miles of local streets were treated at least once. In total, DPW crews covered approximately 7,400 lane miles during the event.

DPW crews work to clear one of Richmond's priority roadways.

Fleet Operations

Fleet preparations began well before the onset of the storm. Two weeks prior to the start of Winter Storm Fern, DPW staff started loading trucks with spreaders and plows (35 in-house). Trucks were then sent to Fleet for repair or maintenance and returned before the start of the storm event. By Friday, January 23, all trucks including 15 rentals, and 10 from DPU were loaded with spreaders and plows, totaling 60 city-operated trucks.
During the storm, Fleet added additional staff to support the repair and maintenance of trucks and other equipment. Again, the prolonged event stressed both equipment and repair staff.

C. Department of General Services (DGS)

DGS's charge is to provide safe building access to City employees and visitors while also minimizing weather-related impacts on City facilities. During a sprinkler head break in an outdoor deck and an AHU unit coil rupture in the City Jail, DGS was able to quickly address and make repairs. Staff protected pipes within the City Hall from exposure to the cold temperatures by closing the bay doors on the entrance and exits to the parking garage.

On Friday 23, 2026, DGS crews began preparing for Winter Storm Fern by treating step, plaza, sidewalks, and parking lots of the John Marshall Court Building. Once the precipitation started, they began plowing efforts and continued treatment of these areas. Another round of plowing and treatment took place at the conclusion of precipitation. DGS also began manual shoveling activities, which include breaking up the ice that had accumulated. The steps were a completely manual task.

DGS staff also worked closely with Procurement to monitor fuel availability and to ensure that critical locations (like 911 communication sites) were fully fueled and had generator redundancy.

D. Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

On Wednesday, January 28, Parks and Rec placed "stay off the ice" signs at Fountain Lake, Byrd Park, and Forest Hill Park to discourage residents from walking or skating on unsafe ice. Parks crews treated lots and removed ice at community facilities. They closed non-winterized buildings to prevent freezing pipes (i.e. the Pony Pasture restroom) and supported the deep cleaning of Southside Community Center following its emergency shelter use.

Parks and Rec staff clear sidewalks and parking spaces around Hickory Hill Community Center.

Parks and Rec staff place signs warning residents of unsafe conditions on icy lakes like the one at Forest Hill Park.

E. Forecast Monitoring & Operational Adaptation

DTN updates

In Central Virginia, the forecast track for Winter Storm Fern evolved dramatically in the days leading up to impact, illustrating the inherent uncertainty of complex winter weather systems in the Mid-Atlantic. Early model guidance suggested the potential for several feet of heavy snowfall as cold air appeared firmly entrenched across the region, prompting preparations for a high-end snow event. Subsequent forecasts, however, trended warmer aloft, shifting projections toward a catastrophic ice scenario with prolonged freezing rain and significant accretion that raised concerns about widespread power outages and tree damage. As the system ultimately unfolded, surface temperatures and precipitation rates fluctuated more than anticipated, resulting in a mixed event that produced moderate snowfall followed by periods of sleet and limited icing rather than the worst-case ice accumulation initially feared. The progression from extreme snow projections to dire ice warnings and finally to a less severe, though still disruptive, outcome highlights the forecasting challenges associated with marginal temperature profiles and storm track variability in Central Virginia.

Real Time Operational Adjustments

As Winter Storm Gianna approached amid sustained sub-freezing temperatures following Winter Storm Fern, the City adjusted its operational posture to reflect prolonged cold and evolving material consumption patterns. Public Works continued 24-hour operations between storms, prioritizing maintenance of Priority 1 and 2 routes while reassessing treatment strategies under persistent temperatures below 20°F.

While salt inventory remained sufficient, sand supplies became strained due to extended operations and repeated applications during sustained freezing conditions. To preserve available resources, DPW adjusted the sand component within treatment mixtures while maintaining salt application levels. This modification allowed operations to continue without interruption and ensured primary routes remained serviceable, though it required careful material management during the extended activation.

In parallel, pre-treatment timing for Gianna was aligned more closely with projected impact, additional contractors were onboarded, and full snow program activation was extended. Emergency shelter operations were also reactivated as part of the sustained cold-weather response strategy.
These operational pivots reflect disciplined resource management and adaptive planning during a prolonged and atypical winter event.

Emergency shelter operations were also reactivated as part of the sustained cold-weather response strategy.
These operational pivots reflect disciplined resource management and adaptive planning during a prolonged and atypical winter event.

VI. Operational Support & Continuity

A. Human Resources

Emergency Declaration Timing

Human Resources provided guidance and operational coordination aligned with the timing of the State of Emergency declarations (See Section 2.A). Essential personnel designations were applied in accordance with Administrative Regulation 1.5 to ensure uninterrupted continuity of operations.

City Closures

On Monday, January 26, and Tuesday, January 27, City offices and buildings were closed while virtual services—such as rva311.com and the Department of Public Utilities Call Center remained available. City offices and buildings re-opened at 12 p.m. on Wednesday, January 28 after the Mayor lifted the State of Emergency at 7 a.m. that morning.

During the building closures, City employees were asked to work remotely unless otherwise directed by department leadership. City closure provisions did not apply to designated essential staff, ensuring that critical services remained operational throughout the event.

Compensation and Collective Bargaining Guidance

Human Resources issued guidance regarding compensation protocols, overtime eligibility, and collective bargaining considerations during the emergency period. This ensured compliance with applicable labor agreements and city policies while supporting extended operational periods and emergency response requirements.

Sustained Staffing

Sustained staffing models were implemented to maintain continuity across departments. Essential personnel were authorized to perform duties remotely where feasible; however, they could be required to report to regular or alternate worksites if remote access, power, or communications were disrupted. Departments maintained operational coverage throughout the emergency period to support emergency operations and core service delivery.

Internal Communications

The Office of Strategic Communications and Human Resources, in conjunction with the CAO's office, communicated closures—along with guidance on safety, technology, and other regulations—to staff throughout the event.

"Employees are the foundation of the city's emergency response. The very heart of HR is making sure that the city has a strong foundation; a foundation that ensures city employees have what they need to perform at a high level while staying safe, including during any type of extreme circumstances. In this effort, HR partners with each department, connecting with leaders and staff to ensure that operations are continuing to run smoothly. My team and I were honored to support our colleagues throughout the organization in our efforts of responding to winter weather."

Trinija Martin | Director of Human Resources

B. Department of Information Technology (DIT)

Systems Continuity

During the Weather EOC activation from January 26 to February 2, 2026, the Department of Information Technology maintained full systems continuity while supporting sustained operations across all essential platforms.

Operational Performance Metrics

- Total Tickets Opened: 823
- Total Tickets Completed: 1,082
- Peak Intake Day: January 28, 2026 (200 tickets opened)
- Peak Completion Day: January 26, 2026 (264 tickets completed)

Operational Analysis

- System intake and processing continuity were maintained throughout EOC activation.
- No system failures, access disruptions, or backlog spikes were observed.
- Ticket completion activity closely tracked intake volume during peak storm impact.
- Operational stability was sustained despite back-to-back storm conditions.

Operational Conclusion

DIT systems remained stable and fully operational, enabling uninterrupted support for citywide emergency operations, remote workforce access, and core enterprise services throughout the compound weather event.

Remote Access and Operational Stability

Microsoft 365 usage data from November 27, 2025, through February 15, 2026, established a 90-day baseline of normal system activity. This data reflects user access and interaction with Microsoft services across all devices.
The most utilized services during the period were Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft Office Applications, represented by the highest usage indicators.

- During the week of January 26–30, system usage was only slightly below baseline levels at the onset of the event and returned to normal ranges by midweek.
- Notably, usage during the weekends immediately before and after the event remained elevated compared to typical weekend activity, indicating sustained remote engagement.
- DIT operates 24x7 support for essential functions and increases response posture during declared emergencies. During this activation:
- All technical staff and management lines were designated essential.
- On-call rotations across twelve support units continued without interruption.
- Cybersecurity operations transitioned to 24x7 coverage utilizing 12-hour shifts.
- DIT deputies and managers served as Emergency Management Liaisons (EMLs), rotating shifts to provide direct executive-level access to the Joint Operations Center (JOC).
- An on-site Help Desk/Desktop resource was deployed when the JOC reached full activation to enhance response time.
- An internal Microsoft Teams channel was established for supervisors and above to share real-time operational updates, minimizing risk of communication loss.

Operational areas supported during the activation included:

Applications

- Utilities
- Finance & Administration
- Enterprise Applications (including ERP)
- Services
- Public Safety
- GIS

Infrastructure

- Networks
- Servers
- Databases

End-User Support

- Help Desk & Desktop
- Asset Management
- Telecommunications

Cybersecurity

- Continuous monitoring and incident response under 24x7 coverage model

These measures ensured operational stability and sustained enterprise technology functionality throughout the emergency period.

C. Procurement

Emergency Purchasing Procedures

In the week leading up to Winter Storm Fern, the Department of Procurement Services (DPS) conducted two citywide training sessions on emergency procurement policies and procedures in accordance with DPS Policy 17: Emergency Purchases. Training materials and supporting documentation were made available to departments in advance of the storm.

Pursuant to Policy 17, the emergency declarations issued by the Governor and the Mayor authorized the implementation of emergency procurement rules for storm-related purchases.

Throughout the response period, DPS maintained 24-hour coverage to support procurement needs at both the leadership and tactical levels. DPS facilitated emergency procurements for items and services, including but not limited to portable sanitation units, storm emergency procedures and restoration services, and intra-city transportation support.

Temporary P-Card Expansion

During the response period for Winter Storm Fern, DPS streamlined severe-weather purchasing by temporarily waiving Critical Purchase Request and meal documentation requirements.

DPS conducted rapid, same-day reviews of all P-Card transactions to ensure emergency operations were not delayed. Accountability controls remained in place by continuing to require complete, itemized receipts and clear supporting documentation for each purchase.

DPS maintained fiscal stewardship by authorizing only reasonable, necessary, and weather-related expenses directly tied to City operations. Baseline compliance monitoring continued throughout the response periods for both Winter Storm Fern and Winter Storm Gianna.

Resupply Protocols

Throughout the response period, existing agency contracts were utilized to ensure the timely and adequate delivery of required materials and supplies.

To the extent that additional emergency purchases were necessary, procurement activities were conducted in accordance with emergency purchasing procedures outlined above.

Chemical and Treatment Purchasing

Agency contracts were utilized throughout the response period to ensure the timely and adequate delivery of chemical and treatment materials required for storm response operations.

Where additional emergency purchases were required, procurement was executed in accordance with established emergency purchasing protocols.

D. Financial Tracking and Cost Controls

To ensure fiscal accountability and to position the City for potential state and federal reimbursement, the Department of Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response (DECPR) tracked all storm-related expenditures using Service Codes SV2637 and SV3638, which were provided by Finance. Departments were directed to code all storm-related purchases to these service codes and to enter transactions into the financial system within 48 hours of purchase to support timely monitoring, reconciliation, and reporting.

Labor and Timekeeping Oversight

Human Resources required HR liaisons and departmental timekeepers to reconcile hours manually submitted on HR worksheets with data extracted from departmental timekeeping systems.

In anticipation of potential reimbursement through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Finance and DECPR required retention of original employee timecards to substantiate all labor costs claimed.

Supervisors, managers, and directors were responsible for reviewing, verifying, and certifying the accuracy of time worked during the storm response period. To promote employee safety and compliance with established labor standards, no employee was authorized to work more than 16 hours in a single shift.

Equipment, Fleet, and Operational Cost Documentation

DGS-Fleet and DECPR required departments to maintain daily operational logs documenting the use of trucks and equipment deployed in response to the winter storms. Logs captured vehicle and equipment utilization, fuel consumption, and any storm-related repair or maintenance costs.

Equipment reliability was heavily influenced by the age and condition of the fleet, particularly snow spreaders that are more than ten years old. Additionally, the lack of off-season covered storage contributes to accelerated wear and corrosion, which increases failure rates during high-demand events.

Parts' availability presented a challenge, as all regional fleets were sourcing similar components at the same time. This demand created delays for certain repairs.

Cost Eligibility and Fiscal Controls

Departments were instructed to exclude expenditures that would have been incurred absent the winter weather events. Only reasonable, necessary, and storm-related costs directly attributable to Winter Storms Fern and Gianna were eligible for coding to Service Codes SV2637 and SV3638.

Finance reports that approximately $4 million in expenditures were coded to Service Codes SV2637 and SV3638. See Section VII: Financial Summary for additional details.

The Department of Budget & Strategic Planning coordinated as requested with departments during the event to monitor expenditures and to ensure that response and recovery costs were accurately captured. Budget will continue to encourage timely posting of transactions to support informed decision-making and enable early identification of potential budgetary impacts. Should event-related costs exceed available appropriations, the Administration will bring forward a budget amendment ordinance for Council consideration prior to the close of the fiscal year.

VII. Financial Summary

	Obligated
Personnel	**2,542,964.43**
Operating	**1,555,547.76**
Grand Total	**4,098,512.19**

VIII. Lessons Learned & Path Forward

A. Future considerations for Finance (Risk Management)

Centralized Risk Coordination

The Administration will consider formalizing early coordination among Finance-Risk Management, Human Resources, and operational departments to improve documentation consistency and overall claim preparedness during weather-related events.

Pre-Event Safety Briefings

The Administration will consider implementing standardized, storm-specific safety briefings prior to field mobilization, with emphasis on cold weather hazards, slip/trip/fall prevention, vehicle safety, and equipment operation, to reduce injury and workers' compensation risk.

Incident Reporting Expectations

The Administration will consider reinforcing supervisory expectations for timely reporting of employee injuries and property damage incidents to support early claim intervention and reduce claim severity.

B. Future Considerations for the Department of Budget & Strategic Planning

While the current budget framework appropriately preserves Council oversight pursuant to City Charter § 6.16, it can limit the Administration's ability to rapidly realign resources during emergency conditions. As a path forward, the Administration, in coordination with Council, should consider whether a narrowly defined policy or ordinance—potentially requiring General Assembly authorization—could provide limited authority for emergency-related budget transfers in a manner that avoids compliance challenges and the need for after-the-fact ratifications, while maintaining transparency and Council oversight through appropriate reporting and notification requirements.

C. Future Considerations for the Department of Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response

The City will integrate lessons from this compound event into a structured Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process led by DECPR in coordination with operational departments. Corrective actions will be documented, assigned ownership, and tracked to completion, with updates incorporated into plans, training, and exercises. As part of this effort, the City will evaluate enhancements to the RVA311 system to ensure that unusual or storm-specific service requests are properly categorized, visible, and assigned during activations to prevent delays or misrouting. Performance metrics related to material sustainability, staffing endurance, interagency coordination, and service request tracking will be reviewed to ensure measurable operational improvement prior to future events.

DECPR will also continue EOC training for essential staff; by way of example, a group of Fire Department staff with EOC designation completed additional training the week of February 23. On February 24, the City also released its finalized Integrated Preparedness Plan, which will continue to guide strategic planning related to emergency response for through 2028.

D. Areas of Improvement

While the City's response to Winter Storms Fern and Gianna was coordinated and effective, the compound and prolonged nature of the event revealed targeted areas for refinement. Road treatment materials become strained during sustained sub-freezing temperatures, requiring DPW to modify mixture ratios to preserve inventory. Although this pivot was operationally effective in maintaining safe travel on priority routes, it was not ideal. Future improvements will focus on ensuring contractors can deliver or offer road treatment materials during off-peak times, such as holidays and weekends.

We will also reevaluate our fatigue management practices during extended activations, and standardize documentation processes for labor, equipment, and cost tracking.

A post-event survey conducted by The Office of Emergency Management revealed priorities and recommendations within three key areas:

1. **Gaps in equipment, staffing, or communication.** These include needs for additional snow removal tools (chemical, hand tool, and heavy equipment), air pumps, and commonly failed fleet components like sprockets and bearings; development of a robust system for tracking resource requests within the EOC; and a more expansive staffing and transportation plan for Emergency Shelter activation.
2. **Needed investments for strengthening future storm response.** These recommendations included advanced hotel block and transportation planning, wraparound service provision for the Emergency Shelter, continued training for equipment operators, and investments in equipment storage.
3. **Supporting community preparedness.** Recommendations included proactive signage discouraging skating on frozen park lakes, additional coordination with faith-based organizations and partners to support shelter activities, and increased communication with homeless populations.

E. Policy and Budget Implications

Winter Storms Fern and Gianna required expanded P-Card flexibility and streamlined purchasing processes to maintain operational speed, reinforcing the need for clear pre-event guidance and consistent compliance standards. Manual labor reconciliation, cost coding, and documentation controls were effective but administratively intensive. Prolonged activation also highlighted limits within the current budget framework for rapid appropriation realignment. Moving forward, the Administration will evaluate targeted improvements that enhance emergency purchasing clarity, streamline financial tracking, and explore narrowly defined budget flexibility—while preserving transparency and fiscal stewardship.

Conclusion

The city's coordinated response to the winter storms demonstrated strong interagency collaboration and a commitment to public safety. The Office of Emergency Management will continue working with all departments to refine procedures, strengthen resilience, and ensure the city is better prepared for future severe weather events.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