

# Continuity of Municipal Operations During COVID-19

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Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation

Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) encompasses the operations and services performed by a municipality during the duration of an emergency. The twenty-four members of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relation (ACIR) - representing a cross section of local, state, education and organized labor understands the urgency to act to maintain the continuity of municipal operations during the pandemic.

All Connecticut towns and cities have Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs) as outlined under CGS 28-7. A communities and the State's EOP is critical to the immediate response to a given disaster to protect the health and welfare of people and property. However, these EOPs do not, nor are they intended to, fully address is the continuity of municipal functions on a long-term basis as a result of a sustained situation - such as COVID-19.

For example, there is no current playback as to how to maintain the functions of essential functions such as assessment, tax collection or town clerk functions - should the persons responsible for those offices be temporarily incapacitated or unable to function through their town hall location. Seemingly mundane matters as accounts payable, accounts receivable, procurement, budget maintenance and audit can not be addressed if the people are not in place or there are prolonged disruptions. Human Resources, perhaps more than any other current town hall discipline, is critical - both for the town and their employees - how will this be addressed. If the town administrative leadership is impacted - how leads and are there systems and expertise in place to ensure proper management? These are only a few examples and questions - there are many more.

This document seeks to address strategies to assist Connecticut's 169 municipalities to maintain local government operations as the state moves through the pandemic and into the next and unknown phase - often referred to as the "new normal."

Connecticut's 169 towns and cities vary in terms of size, government structure (*mayor-council, mayor-aldermen, first selectman-council, selectman-representative town meeting and council-manager*) - some operate by fully statute and others (106) have a charter, fiscal management structure, staff capacity, IT capacity and more. Our towns run from 850 in Union to Bridgeport with 114,900 people. Connecticut is rural, suburban and urban - booked by the New York metro and the Boston/Providence metro regions. It is a state the holds close its "home rule" roots and authorities in terms of local governance. The functional obligations - reflected in the common offices located in each town - are essentially the same:

- **Administration** (*appointed or elected*) - *Basic business functions*
- **Animal Control**
- **Assessor**
- **Economic/Community Development** - *Economic Development Commission*
- **Emergency Management**
- **Facilities Management**
- **Finance** - *Town Treasurer, Board of Finance*

- **Fire Marshal**
- **Housing** - *Building & Housing Inspection*
- **Human Resources**
- **Human Services**
- **Information Technology**
- **Land Use** - *Building Land Use Office (Building Official and Planner/ZEO), Planning and Zoning Commission, Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency*
- **Parks & Recreation** - *Recreation Commission*
- **Public Library**
- **Public Safety** - *Police, Ambulance, Fire*
- **Public Works** - *Highway Department, Utilities*
- **Recreation** - *Recreation Commission*
- **Registrar of Voters**
- **Senior Services**
- **Tax Collector**
- **Trash/Recycling Services**
- **Town Clerk's Office**
- **Youth Services**
- **Water Pollution Control Authority**

The COVID-19 crisis raises the very real possibility that in place leadership in any given town for multiple functions may be incapacitated - disrupting that service for the community. The challenge is, in short order, to develop a flexible response for our municipalities for Interim processes that may be conducted to temporarily support the function.

The varied expertise and diversity of experience in place at the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) makes it well suited to take on this task in coordination with the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) Intergovernmental Policy and Planning Division (IGPP) to aide in the operation of our towns and cities as our stare addresses the COVID-19 pandemic.

This approach should involve the development of:

- Municipal ombudsman within OPM IGPP to coordinate response for the governor
- Review and recommendations to the Governor for possible future Executive Orders by ACIR of other temporary changes or restructuring to enable municipalities to get through the short/ medium term and be ready to be back on track when a "normal" business cycle is possible
- A peer-to-peer network of experts (municipal, academic, non-profit and business) in any of the above identified municipal functions to serve as "experts on call" to assist communities with questions and best practices
- Shared or regional approaches to use capacity of larger communities or utilize economies of scale through regional COGs and RESCs to deliver services
- A special municipal resource website with updates, best practices, model documents, data, information and more to routinely assist communities

Attached is a detailed spreadsheet that comprehensively identifies municipal functions, the issues presenting themselves, Governor Lamonts to date Executive Orders impact many of these issues and ACIRs proposed actions to ensure the continuity of municipal operations.