



**Special Communication to City of Burlington
Emergency Operations Center and Mayor
Regarding COVID-19**



From: Meagan Tuttle & David White of City Analytics Team and Rachel Jolly of the RRC

RE: Creation of a One-Stop Virtual Resource and Recovery Center (RRC)

Date: April 6, 2020

Overview:

- Early assessment of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic identified a significant and long-term array of challenges facing Burlington's citizens and businesses
- In addition to research on non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI's) that would enable the City to respond and mitigate the spread of the virus, the City Analytics Team was charged with two key response and recovery tasks.
 - [Developing initial guidance](#) for BTV businesses to enable them to prepare for the growing pandemic and its implications for ongoing business operations, and keeping their employees and customers safe.
 - Assembling a list of potential sources of both relief and direct financial assistance – everything from policy changes such as the suspension of late payment fees and service shut-off of utilities, to available local, state and federal grants and loans.
- It was immediately clear that there was an important role for the City to serve as a clearinghouse where both residents and businesses could go for help, as well as a way for the City to see where the greatest needs were emerging.
- Under the leadership of the City's Community and Economic Development (CEDO) Director Luke McGowan, the CEDO staff was quickly re-organized and re-purposed to receive inquiries via a centralized call center and deliver information via a dedicated website
- Additional staff support from several other city departments - BED, Permitting and Inspections, Parks and Recreation, and the Fletcher Free Library - were added to help field inquires and manage the website.
- The Resource and Recovery Center began taking its first calls at noon on March 23, 2020.
- In April, the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development stood-up a similar online center to assist residents and businesses statewide.

Sources

Burlington Resource & Recovery Center Online: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/Resources>

VT ACCD Recovery Resource Center: <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19>

Summary

Initial financial support for the RRC came from an allocation of \$1,000,000 from the Burlington Telecom sale proceeds to create a COVID-19 Emergency Account to fund the Emergency Operations Center and Resource and Recovery Center. (approved by the City Council on March 23, 2020)

The funds will be used for three things:

1. The salaries of the City workers staffing the Recovery Center (most of whom are otherwise supported by dedicated state and federal grants sources);
2. Expenses incurred by the Emergency Operations Center; and,
3. Reserve for urgent needs that may emerge in the coming weeks.

The City will seek to reimburse any spending related to COVID-19 recovery efforts with federal FEMA Public Assistance and other bail-out funding for municipalities, should it become available. Generally, FEMA generally reimburses 75% of qualifying disaster-related expenses.

The role of Burlington's Resource and Recovery Center is to:

- Connect people experiencing homelessness with resources for temporary shelters that meet social distancing guidance;
- Assist laid-off workers in applying for unemployment insurance;
- Coordinate with and assist residents, particularly renters, who are concerned about housing security;
- Work with local and small businesses to navigate insurance claims or federal and state resources;
- Coordinate the dissemination of health guidance in other languages;
- Manage and streamline community volunteering efforts, including ensuring that volunteers are following all safety orders and connecting volunteers with people and organizations in need; and.
- Respond to needs and opportunities yet anticipated.

The work of the center takes three forms:

1. Constituent support (e.g., 1:1 consultations or rapid deployment of modest City financial support, including appropriating existing Small Business Administration Loan funds, CDBG dollars, or accelerated release of Housing Trust Fund appropriations);
2. Technical assistance and referrals to other organizations (e.g., routing a request to the appropriate State, nonprofit, or volunteer entity); and
3. A channel to identify gaps in assistance efforts and direct to appropriate authorities for attention as this crisis unfolds.

The RRC is currently organized to help people and answer questions in almost 20 different categories (Small Business Support, Unemployment, Food, Housing Assistance, Childcare, etc.). All requests for assistance are channeled through the City's [See-Click-Fix](#) request for service system for tracking and documentation purposes.

Since coming online on March 23, there have been 202 requests reported (as of 4/6/20):

- The largest % of requests at 22% being small business & employer needs
- ~13% each related to unemployment/labor, physical health, and miscellaneous (not sure what all is here)
- ~10% each renter assistance/evictions, offers to volunteer
- 5.5% homelessness and housing needs
- The rest include food requests, vulnerable persons, senior needs, language access needs, and request for volunteer assistance.

