



The town of
GHENT

Public Employer Health Emergency Plan

Date of approved plan: March 18, 2021

Promulgation

This plan has been developed in accordance with New York State Labor Law section 27-c.

This plan has been developed with the input of Teamsters Local 294, as required by the New York State Labor Law.

No content of this plan is intended to impede, infringe, diminish, or impair the rights of us or our valued employees under any law, rule, regulation, or collectively negotiated agreement, or the rights and benefits which accrue to employees through collective bargaining agreements, or otherwise diminish the integrity of the existing collective bargaining relationship.

This plan has been approved in accordance with requirements applicable to the agency, jurisdiction, authority, or district, as represented by the signature of the authorized individual below.

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As the authorized official of Town of Ghent, I hereby attest that this plan has been developed, approved, and placed in full effect in accordance with New York State Labor Law section 27-c to address public health emergency planning requirements.

Signed on this day:

By: Mike Benvenuto

Signature: _____

Title: Supervisor

Record of Changes

Date of Change	Description of Change	Implemented by

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Purpose, Scope, Situation Overview, and Assumptions

Purpose

This plan has been developed in accordance with New York State Labor Law section 27-c, which requires public employers to adopt a plan for operations in the event of a declared public health emergency involving a communicable disease. The plan includes the identification of essential positions, facilitation of remote work for non-essential positions, provision of personal protective equipment, and protocols for supporting contact tracing.

Scope

This plan was developed exclusively for and is applicable to the Town of Ghent. This plan is pertinent to a declared public health emergency in the State of New York which may impact our operations; and it is in the interest of the safety of our employees and contractors, and the continuity of our operations that we have promulgated this plan.

Situation Overview

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization declared a pandemic for the novel coronavirus which causes the COVID-19 severe acute respiratory syndrome. This plan has been developed in accordance with amended laws to support continued resilience for a continuation of the spread of this disease or for other infectious diseases which may emerge and cause a declaration of a public health emergency.

The health and safety of our employees and contractors is crucial to maintaining our mission essential operations. We encourage all employees and contractors to use [CDC Guidance for Keeping Workplaces, Schools, Homes, and Commercial Establishments Safe](#). The fundamentals of reducing the spread of infection include:

- Using hand sanitizer and washing hands with soap and water frequently, including:
 - After using the restroom
 - After returning from a public outing
 - After touching/disposing of garbage
 - After using public computers, touching public tables, and countertops, etc.
- Practice social distancing when possible
- If you are feeling ill or have a fever, notify your supervisor immediately and go home
- If you start to experience coughing or sneezing, step away from people and food, cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm or a tissue, the latter of which should be disposed of immediately
- Clean and disinfect workstations at the beginning, middle, and end of each shift
- Other guidance which may be published by the CDC, the State Department of Health, or County health officials.

Planning Assumptions

This plan was developed based on information, best practices, and guidance available as of the date of publication. The plan was developed to largely reflect the circumstances of the current Coronavirus pandemic but may also be applicable to other infectious disease outbreaks. The following assumptions have been made:

- A public health emergency may directly impact our own operations.
- The impact of a public health emergency will take time for us to respond to, with appropriate safety measures put into place and adjustments made to operations to maximize safety.

- The public and our residents expects us to maintain a level of essential Town services.
- Resource support from other jurisdictions may be limited based upon the level of impact the public health emergency has upon them.
- Supply chains, particularly those for personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies, may be heavily impacted, resulting in considerable delays in procurement.
- The operations of other entities, including the private sector (vendors, contractors, etc.), non-profit organizations, and other governmental agencies and services may also be impacted due to the public health emergency, causing delays or other disruptions in their services.
- Emergency measures and operational changes may need to be adjusted based upon the specific circumstances and impacts of the public health emergency, as well as guidance and direction from public health officials, the governor, and/or the federal government.
- The below definitions shall be utilized within the plan and have the following meaning pursuant to Labor Law Section 27-c(1) (a)-(g):
 - “Contractor” is an individual performing services as a party to a contract awarded by the Town.
 - “Essential employee’ is a public employee or contractor that is required to be physically present at a work site to perform their job.
 - “Non-essential employee’ is a public employee or contractor that is not required to be physically present at a work site to perform their job.

Concept of Operations

The Supervisor of the Town of Ghent, their designee, or their successor holds the authority to execute and direct the implementation of this plan. Implementation, monitoring of operations, and adjustments to plan implementation may be supported by additional personnel, at the discretion of the Supervisor.

Upon the determination of implementing this plan, all employees and contractors of the Town of Ghent shall be notified by email, with details provided as possible and necessary, with additional information and updates provided on a regular basis. The public will be notified of pertinent operational changes by way of the Town website. Other interested parties, such as vendors, will be notified by phone and/or email as necessary. The Supervisor will maintain communications with the public and constituents as needed throughout the implementation of this plan.

The Supervisor of the Town of Ghent, will maintain awareness of information, direction, and guidance from public health officials and the Governor’s office, directing the implementation of changes as necessary.

Upon resolution of the public health emergency, the Supervisor of the Town of Ghent, their designee, or their successor will direct the resumption of normal operations or operations with modifications as necessary.

Essential Positions

When confronting events that disrupt normal operations, the Town of Ghent is committed to ensuring that essential functions will be continued even under the most challenging circumstances.

Essential functions are those functions that enable an organization to:

1. Maintain the safety of employees, contractors, and our constituency
2. Provide vital services
3. Provide services required by law

4. Sustain quality operations
5. Uphold the core values of the Town of Ghent

The Town of Ghent has identified as critical only those priority functions that are required or are necessary to provide vital services. During activation of this plan, all other activities may be suspended to enable the organization to concentrate on providing the critical functions and building the internal capabilities necessary to increase and eventually restore operations. Appropriate communications with employees, contractors, and our residents will be an ongoing priority.

Essential functions are prioritized according to:

- The time criticality of each essential function
- Interdependency of a one function to others
- The recovery sequence of essential functions and their vital processes

Each essential function identified requires certain positions on-site to effectively operate. The table below identifies the positions or titles that are essential to be staffed on-site for the continued operation of each essential function. Note that while some functions and associated personnel may be essential, some of these can be conducted remotely and do not need to be identified in this section. Essential options that cannot perform their duties fully while in remote status are listed with the percentage of their weekly scheduled hours that they must be on-site.

Essential Function/Position	Description
Supervisor*	-Responsibilities include: presiding officer of town meetings, town legislator, town executive and administrator, town fiscal officer, and representative of the town in county government.
Highway Department : -Highway Superintendent	-Primary responsibility for the maintenance and repair of town highways and bridges, and the removal of obstructions caused by brush and snow.
-Working Foreman	-Responsibility for acting as a work leader over a small work crew and may actively participate in the work projects being carried on.
-Highway Equip. Maintenance Mechanic	-Responsibility for performing repairs, which require a high level of skill, to diesel and gasoline powered, self-propelled and non-self-propelled motor driven equipment, vehicles and stationary equipment.
-Senior Automotive Mechanic	-Responsibility for the complete overhaul and repair of a wide variety of automotive equipment including heavy duty equipment such as bulldozers, graders, tractors, snow plows and tractors; and the operation of various types of motor equipment.
-Senior Motor Equipment Operator	-Responsibility for performing recurring manual duties in connection with the operation of various types of motor equipment.
-Motor Equipment Operator	-Responsibility for performing limited types of recurring manual duties in connection with the operation of various types of motor equipment.

-Highway Laborer Part-time	
-Highway Bookkeeper	
Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk*	-Responsibility for most town records, issues certain licenses and permits, files reports with county and State agencies as required, is involved with election administration, posts legal notices, and is, in many ways, a pivot around which the town operates.
Custodian	
Dog Control Officer	-Enforcement of dog control laws, seizure and subsequent disposition of stray dogs, and related record-keeping.
Maintenance	
ZEO/Building Inspector* & Deputies*	-Responsibility to enforce codes, ordinances, rules and regulations of the town and of the zoning ordinance of the town, and to inspect buildings, structures and premises to enforce the foregoing.

Note that while the Town Board, the Planning Board, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Board of Assessment, the Assessor, and the Assessor Clerk are all essential functions of the Town, these functions can be completed remotely through communication services such as Zoom, provided their meetings are permitted pursuant to State law. Additionally, those titles marked * may perform some of their duties remotely.

It is important to note that Justice Court is a vital component of town government, with Justice Court functions budgeted and supported by the Town Board and Town Supervisor. However, we recognize that the New York State Office of Court Administration holds dominion over Justice Courts and, as such, may issue orders which suspend or alter the hours of operation or means by which Justice Courts operate; which may not fully align with this plan or other measures taken by the Town Board or Town Supervisor. As such, the Town Board, Town Supervisor, and Town Clerk will coordinate as necessary with Justice Court personnel to ensure safe and effective continuity of town Justice Court.

Reducing Risk Through Remote Work and Staggered Shifts

Through assigning certain staff to work remotely and by staggering work shifts, we can decrease crowding and density at work sites and on public transportation.

Remote Work Protocols

Non-essential employees and contractors able to accomplish their functions remotely will be enabled to do so at the greatest extent possible. Working remotely requires:

1. Identification of staff who will work remotely
2. Approval and assignment of remote work
3. Equipping staff for remote work, which may include:
 - a. Internet capable laptop
 - b. Necessary peripherals
 - c. Access to VPN and/or secure network drives
 - d. Access to software and databases necessary to perform their duties

- e. A solution for telephone communications

Note that phone lines may need to be forwarded to off-site staff.

The Town Board will coordinate with employees individually to set a plan for remote work and ensure that the proper equipment is provided to employees who will be working remotely. For example, currently the Assessor has been provided with a laptop and the ZEO/Building Inspector has been provided with an iPad, each of which has the appropriate software needed for their respective job. During periods of emergency, Town Boards (the Town Board, Zoning, Planning, Assessment, etc.) will meet remotely through communication services such as Zoom, provided such meetings are permitted pursuant to State law.

As possible, 'essential' staff may be assigned to work remotely for part of their work week to reduce exposures. Further, business hours and locations of Town government may be altered to best accommodate public health protective actions for employees and the public. Alterations to building access and the means by which the public interacts with Town employees may also take place to support these protections. Protective actions may include, but are not limited to occupancy restrictions, protective barriers, and increased conduct of business by internet, phone, or other means. Protective actions will be taken in accordance with County and State Health Department, and CDC guidelines and requirements.

Staggered Shifts

Implementing staggered shifts may be possible for personnel performing duties which are necessary to be performed on-site but perhaps less sensitive to being accomplished only within core business hours. As possible, management will identify opportunities for staff to work outside core business hours as a strategy of limiting exposure. Regardless of changes in start and end times of shifts, the Town of Ghent will ensure that employees are provided with their typical or contracted minimum work hours per week. Staggering shifts requires:

1. Identification of positions for which work hours will be staggered
2. Approval and assignment of changed work hours

The Supervisor will develop a plan with the Town Clerk, Assessor, the ZEO/Building Inspector, and any other employees requiring access to Town Hall to establish appropriate staggered shifts for work therein. The Highway Superintendent will develop a plan that will be presented to the Teamsters Local 294 for discussion and agreement to adjust work hours to provide for staggered shifts whenever possible. The Town and Teamsters Local 294 agree to engage in discussions, within ten (10) days of the request, regarding the plan to adjust hours for staggered shifts, prior to implementation, to ensure the health and safety of employees and the public. In the event that the implementation is not a result of mutual agreement, the Teamsters retains the right to demand the parties engage in mediation with a mediator selected from the PERB mediator list and the cost of same shall be borne equally by both parties. Further, the parties agree to mediate in good faith. Each employee working staggered shifts will have the appropriate access to their applicable work spaces, as necessary, and utilities (heat, electricity, etc.) will function in public buildings during non-core hours as well as regular hours if such shifts take place during non-core hours. Outdoor lighting will operate for safety during any staggered shift after sunset.

Personal Protective Equipment

The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce the spread of infectious disease is important to supporting the health and safety of our employees and contractors. PPE which may be needed can include:

- Masks
- Face shields
- Gloves
- Disposable gowns and aprons

Note that while cleaning supplies are not PPE, there is a related need for cleaning supplies used to sanitize surfaces, as well as hand soap and hand sanitizer. The Coronavirus pandemic demonstrated that supply chains were not able to keep up with increased demand for these products early in the pandemic. As such, we are including these supplies in this section as they are pertinent to protecting the health and safety of our employees and contractors.

Protocols for providing PPE include the following:

1. Identification of need for PPE based upon job duties and work location
2. Procurement of PPE
 - a. As specified in the amended law, public employers must be able to provide at least two pieces of each required type of PPE to each essential employee and contractor during any given work shift for at least six months
 - b. Public employers must be able to mitigate supply chain disruptions to meet this requirement
3. Storage of, access to, and monitoring of PPE stock
 - a. PPE must be stored in a manner which will prevent degradation
 - b. Employees and contractors must have immediate access to PPE in the event of an emergency
 - c. The supply of PPE must be monitored to ensure integrity and to track usage rates

The type of PPE available to each function of the Town will be based on the job duties of the individuals in the department, and the locations in which the job is performed. The Town of Ghent will procure PPE from the Columbia County Office of Emergency Management, and such PPE will be stored at the Town of Ghent Highway Garage. The Town has provided cloth masks to on-site employees and will maintain an inventory of five hundred disposable masks and four gallons of hand sanitizer. The Highway Superintendent, the Supervisor, and their designees will have access to these supplies, and will be responsible for monitoring and maintaining the PPE stock.

Staff Exposures, Cleaning, and Disinfection

Staff Exposures

Staff exposures are organized under several categories based upon the type of exposure and presence of symptoms. Following CDC guidelines, we have established the following protocols:

- A. If employees or contractors are exposed to a known case of communicable disease that is the subject of the public health emergency (defined as a 'close contact' with someone who is confirmed infected, which is a prolonged presence within six feet with that person):

1. Potentially exposed employees or contractors who do not have symptoms should remain at home or in a comparable setting and practice social distancing for the lesser of 14 days or other current CDC/public health guidance for the communicable disease in question.
 - a. As possible, these employees will be permitted to work remotely during this period of time if they are not ill.
 - b. The Supervisor must be notified and will be responsible for ensuring these protocols are followed.
 - c. See the section titled Documentation of Work Hours and Locations for additional information on contact tracing.
2. CDC guidelines for COVID-19 provide that critical essential employees may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure, provided they remain symptom-free and additional precautions are taken to protect them, other employees and contractors, and our constituency/public.
 - a. Additional precautions will include the requirement of the subject employee or contractor, as well as others working in their proximity, to wear appropriate PPE at all times to limit the potential of transmission.
 - b. In-person interactions with the subject employee or contractor will be limited as much as possible.
 - c. Work areas in which the subject employee or contractor are present will be disinfected according to current CDC/public health protocol at least every hour, as practical. See the section on Cleaning and Disinfection for additional information on that subject.
 - d. If at any time they exhibit symptoms, refer to item B below.
 - e. The Supervisor will be the decision-maker in these circumstances and who is responsible for ensuring these protocols are followed.

Item 2 above may not apply if the public employer is not considered critical infrastructure. [Additional information can be found here.](#)

- B. If an employee or contractor exhibits symptoms of the communicable disease that is the subject of the public health emergency:
 1. Employees and contractors who exhibit symptoms in the workplace should be immediately separated from other employees, customers, and visitors. They should immediately be sent home with a recommendation to contact their physician.
 2. Employees and contractors who exhibit symptoms outside of work should notify their supervisor and stay home, with a recommendation to contact their physician.
 3. Employees should not return to work until they have met the criteria to discontinue home isolation per CDC/public health guidance and have consulted with a healthcare provider.
 4. The Town of Ghent will not require sick employees to provide a negative test result for the disease in question or healthcare provider's note to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or return to work; unless there is a recommendation from the CDC/public health officials to do so.
 5. CDC criteria for COVID-19 provides that persons exhibiting symptoms may return to work if at least 24 hours have passed since the last instance of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. If the disease in question is other than COVID-19, CDC and other public guidance shall be referenced.
 6. The Supervisor must be informed in these circumstances and will be responsible for ensuring these protocols are followed.

- C. If an employee or contractor has tested positive for the communicable disease that is the subject of the public health emergency:
 1. Apply the steps identified in item B, above, as applicable.
 2. Areas occupied for prolonged periods of time by the subject employee or contractor will be closed off.
 - a. CDC guidance for COVID-19 indicates that a period of 24 hours is ideally given before cleaning, disinfecting, and reoccupation of those spaces will take place. If this time period is not possible, a period of as long as possible will be given. CDC/public health guidance for the disease in question will be followed.
 - b. Any common areas entered, surfaces touched, or equipment used shall be cleaned and disinfected immediately.
 - c. See the section on Cleaning and Disinfection for additional information on that subject.
 3. Identification of potential employee and contractor exposures will be conducted
 - a. If an employee or contractor is confirmed to have the disease in question, the Columbia County Health Department or their designee should inform all contacts of their possible exposure. Confidentiality shall be maintained as required by law.
 - b. Apply the steps identified in item A, above, as applicable, for all potentially exposed personnel.
 4. The Supervisor must be notified in these circumstances and shall be responsible for ensuring these protocols are followed.

We recognize there may be nuances or complexities associated with potential exposures, close contacts, symptomatic persons, and those testing positive. We will follow CDC/public health recommendations and requirements and coordinate with our local public health office for additional guidance and support as needed.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

CDC/public health guidelines will be followed for cleaning and disinfection of surfaces/areas. Present guidance for routine cleaning during a public health emergency includes:

1. As possible, employees and contractors will clean their own workspaces in the beginning, middle, and end of their shifts, at a minimum.
2. High traffic/high touch areas and areas which are accessible to the public/constituents will be disinfected multiple times daily by the Custodian or other Town employees in accordance with CDC/public health recommendations and requirements.
3. Staff tasked with cleaning and disinfecting areas will be issued and required to wear PPE appropriate to the task.
4. Soiled surfaces will be cleaned with soap and water before being disinfected.
5. Surfaces will be disinfected with products that meet EPA criteria for use against the virus in question and which are appropriate for that surface.
6. Staff will follow instructions of cleaning products to ensure safe and effective use of the products.

Employee and Contractor Leave

Public health emergencies are extenuating and unanticipated circumstances in which the Town of Ghent is committed to reducing the burden on our employees and contractors. The NYS COVID Sick leave law provides for paid time off for employees exposed and/or positive for the virus.

Employees will be provided with up to fourteen calendar days of paid sick leave at the employee's regular rate of pay for a period which the employee is unable to work due to quarantine (in accordance with federal, state, or local orders or advice of a healthcare provider), and/or experiencing symptoms and seeking medical diagnosis. Further, in accordance with the NYS Department of Labor, if an employee, who has already utilized COVID-19 Sick Leave pay and subsequently tests positive, they shall be entitled to two additional periods of paid COVID-19 Sick Leave if each of the subsequent leaves are a result of positive test.

The Town will also follow NYS Department of Health return to work protocols and guidelines for those workers designated essential who have either been exposed to a confirmed case of the communicable disease or who have a confirmed or suspected case of communicable disease.

Additional provisions may be enacted based upon need and the guidance and requirements in place by federal and state employment laws, FMLA, executive orders, and other potential sources.

Contractors, either independent or affiliated with a contracted firm, are not classified as employees of the Town of Ghent, and as such are not provided with paid leave time by the Town of Ghent, unless required by law.

Documentation of Work Hours and Locations

In a public health emergency, it may be necessary to document work hours and locations of each employee and contractor to support contact tracing efforts. Identification of locations shall include on-site work, off-site visits. This information may be used by the Town of Ghent to support contact tracing within the organization and may be shared with local public health officials.

For the Highway Department, the Highway Superintendent will maintain a daily paper-based schedule of projects, locations, and staffing. For other departments requiring on-site, in-person services, employees shall keep either a paper-based or electronic log of their hours and locations, which will be provided to the Supervisor upon request as necessary to support contact tracing.

Housing for Essential Employees

There are circumstances within a public health emergency when it may be prudent to have essential employees lodged in such a manner which will help prevent the spread of the subject communicable disease to protect these employees from potential exposures, thus helping to ensure their health and safety and the continuity of the Town of Ghent's essential operations.

If such a need arises, hotel rooms are expected to be the most viable option. If hotel rooms are for some reason deemed not practical or ideal, or if there are no hotel rooms available, the Town of Ghent will coordinate with the Columbia County Office of Emergency Management to help identify and arrange for these housing needs. The Director of the Columbia County Office of Emergency Management and the Supervisor shall be responsible for coordinating this.

Procedure to Report and Protections

In the event that an employee or contract worker becomes aware of any alleged or believed violations of Labor Law 27-c or the provisions of this plan, they may submit the information of such alleged or believed violations by informing the Town Attorney and Town Supervisor. They shall be tasked with reviewing and addressing any said reports. Notification shall be made in writing, which may be submitted via email, hand delivery to their respective offices or by first class mail to Town Hall.

No employee shall suffer retaliation or discrimination for making suggestions or recommendations regarding the content of the Town's plan.

The requirements of NYS Labor Law section 27-c shall in anyway be deemed to impede, infringer, diminish or impairs the rights of the employee and the County as established under any law, rule, regulation or collective bargaining agreement, or the rights and benefits that accrue to employees through the collective bargaining agreement or otherwise diminish the integrity of the existing collective bargaining agreements.

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