



Crushing COVID-19: *A guide to recovery*

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City of River Falls, Wisconsin
Updated Feb. 18, 2021

I. Summary

Implementation of the City of River Falls “Crushing COVID-19: A guide to recovery” will follow guidance and direction from the State of Wisconsin, public health officials, and City leadership throughout its response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the City will remain focused on five core functions:

- Delivering quality public safety services
- Supporting the local economy and business community
- Connecting the community to resources
- Maintaining infrastructure and providing safe utilities
- Ensuring organizational resilience

The services provided to the community, through staff efforts and allocation of resources, will be guided by these principles:

- Being adaptable in the face of change and uncertainty
- Capitalizing on opportunities for improvement
- Removing barriers
- Applying lessons learned in response
- Aligning, collaborating, and innovating with partners

It is likely that COVID-19-related response and recovery operations will need to be sustained for 6-12 months or longer. City staff will remain focused on core strategic initiatives and community needs while remaining flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances.

II. Introduction

The National Response Framework, part of the National Strategy for Homeland Security, operates on the premise that large-scale emergencies and response programs are federally supported, state managed, and locally executed. The state manages emergency responses through regulatory mandates, emergency orders, legislative activities, and advisory services. State efforts and programs are often administered through the counties, including, in the case of COVID-19, with county public health officials. The City of River Falls does not maintain its own public health official; instead, the City chooses, via mayoral action, to appoint both the St. Croix and Pierce county health officials to serve in that capacity.

City officials work together to maintain the peace, safety, welfare, and health of both residents and visitors. When it comes to administering, managing, and delivering programs to serve the needs of the community, the City takes the lead.

This plan serves as a set of guidelines to aid staff and local officials in executing the City's COVID-19 response and recovery. This plan is subject to change based on local or statewide circumstances, local health official recommendations, or COVID-19 developments.

This plan does not supersede statewide plans, regulations, policies, or statutes. However, it was developed to serve the best interests of the City of River Falls, with the greatest good in mind. What may be best for Milwaukee or Madison may not be best for the City of River Falls; in fact, it is likely that the situation(s) and related policies and actions occurring just across the border in Minnesota will impact River Falls just as much as what may be occurring elsewhere in Wisconsin.

III. Background

The City of River Falls initiated preparedness and response efforts related to COVID-19 on March 10, 2020. A public health emergency was declared for the State of Wisconsin on March 12, 2020, and a local emergency was declared by the City Council for the City of River Falls on March 24, 2020. The Wisconsin Safer at Home order was put into effect by Governor Tony Evers on March 25, 2020, and, on April 24, was extended until May 26, 2020. It was subsequently invalidated by the Wisconsin State Supreme Court on May 13, 2020.

The City of River Falls is empowered to order, by ordinance or resolution, whatever is necessary and expedient for the health, safety, protection, and welfare of persons and property within the City during the emergency¹. These orders can be issued directly by the Mayor or the Emergency Management Director via proclamation when it is not feasible for the entire governing body to meet². Such orders cannot conflict with state or county authority. To date, such orders by the City have authorized the following:

- Closing City buildings and facilities to regular public access
- Closing all park facilities, sporting courts, playgrounds, and the dog park
- Suspending regular committee and advisory board meetings
- Transitioning City Council meetings to a virtual platform
- Suspending utility disconnects and late fees
- Suspending recreational programming

In addition to these orders, the City of River Falls swiftly implemented an aggressive social distancing plan within City buildings, and an agile remote working and alternative work site/scheduling strategy for City staff. Municipal operations were curtailed to ensure compliance with the “safer at home” expectations and an interim citywide organizational strategy was implemented, which realigned City programs and efforts into five core functional areas:

- Delivering quality public safety services
- Supporting the local economy and the business community
- Connecting the community to resources
- Maintaining infrastructure and providing safe utilities
- Ensuring organizational resilience

¹ Wis. Stats. §323.14 (4) (a)

² Wis. Stats. §323.14 (4) (b)

IV. Regulatory Framework

On April 20, 2020, Governor Tony Evers revealed his Badger Bounce Back Plan, outlining the steps and measures necessary to reopen Wisconsin. While the plan was overturned on May 13 by the State Supreme Court, the City intends to incorporate elements of a phased approach and a best-practice business model regarding local facilities and public spaces. The City will also utilize best practice models from the Center for Disease Control (CDC)³ and Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)⁴ to be incorporated into the City's systematically-phased approach to recovery.

On May 15, 2020, Pierce⁵ and St. Croix⁶ counties issued health advisories in lieu of local orders to residents of their respective jurisdictions. Since the City of River Falls is located in both, staff worked with county officials seeking consistency in their advisories.

Generally, both counties issued the following initial recommendations:

- **Individuals taking preventative measures and following physical distancing guidelines** to control the spread of the disease.
- **Limiting gatherings to under 10 people**
Large gatherings quickly widen the number of individuals in close contact with one another. An infectious individual at even one large gathering could quickly outstrip local capacity to contact trace and quarantine or isolate those impacted.
- **Avoiding non-essential travel outside communities**
Travel to other communities, especially those with higher transmission rates, continues to put residents in Pierce and St. Croix counties at risk.
- **Advising local businesses to adopt best practices to safeguard their staff, customers, and the community**
Local businesses support the health of Pierce and St. Croix County families, but without good practices and consistent physical distancing, these businesses can easily become sources of disease transmission. To avoid becoming a source of transmission, businesses must have adequate cleaning, physical distancing, and staff symptom monitoring practices in place.

³ CDC Guidance for Where You Live, Work, Learn, Pray, and Play available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

⁴ WEDC Reopen Guidelines available from: <https://wedc.org/reopen-guidelines/>

⁵ Pierce County Public Health Advisory available from: https://www.co.pierce.wi.us/Public%20Health/PDF/Publications_Data/COVID-19%20Posts/PH%20Advisory%2051520.pdf

⁶ St. Croix County Public Health Advisory available from: <https://www.sccwi.gov/951/St-Croix-County-Health-Advisory>

V. Local Execution

The Badger Bounce Back Plan was a statewide plan without an apparent regional focus. As allowed by law, the City of River Falls will consider regional and local circumstances and conditions when implementing its plan. After the state's plan was overturned on May 13, 2020, Pierce and St. Croix Counties issued recommendations on May 15, 2020, to provide guidelines that include limiting the activities that put residents at highest risk.

The City may implement additional measures or restrictions due to local impact(s) as the Mayor deems necessary and approved by the City Council. It may also help provide definition to some areas left unclear by future state orders or where local enforcement is involved.

In addition to its partnership with the counties, staff has also convened regular meetings with senior leadership at the Allina-River Falls Area Hospital and city administrators in New Richmond and Hudson. Staff also regularly attends COVID-19-related meetings held by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, St. Croix Emergency Management, and the River Falls Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau. These discussions as well as feedback from the community will help advise policy makers when considering phasing.

VI. Gating Criteria

Unless the Mayor directs otherwise, the City will transition from phase to phase in a similar fashion as to what was prescribed in the Badger Bounce Back Plan. That plan used gating criteria before moving to the next phase. The statewide gating criteria chart is shown below for illustrative purposes and is utilized as one of the informational sources for determining whether or not to advance to the next phase, remain in a particular phase, or revert to a previous phase. Local and regional situational data are primary sources for making these data-informed decisions as well. The inclusion, or exclusion, of particular data metrics can be amended from time to time, depending on public health input and staff consideration.

It is possible, at the direction of the Mayor, that the City advance to the next phase within this plan even if the state remains at a particular phase of the Badger Bounce Back Plan. The City may stay in a current phase as other portions of the state move forward, or may even return to a previous phase, if local public health is compromised.

A. Statewide

Indicator	Metric	Statewide	
Symptoms	Downward trajectory of influenza-like illnesses reported within a 14-day period	<input type="radio"/>	
Symptoms	Downward trajectory of COVID-like syndromic cases reported within a 14-day period.	<input type="radio"/>	
Cases	Downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period.	<input type="radio"/>	Regional
Hospitals	95% of hospitals affirm that they can treat all patients without crisis standards of care.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hospitals	95% of all hospitals affirm that they have arranged for testing for all symptomatic staff	<input type="radio"/>	
Healthcare	Downward trend of COVID-19 cases among healthcare workers calculated weekly.	<input type="radio"/>	

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/prepare.htm>

B. Local Considerations

REPORTING DATE		Date	Date	Date
Cumulative Cases – St. Croix County / Pierce County				
# of new COVID-19 positive test results – St. Croix / Pierce				
# of COVID-19 hospitalizations – St. Croix / Pierce				
# of COVID-19 deaths – St. Croix / Pierce				
Adequate PPE for City response staff: Green = ≥60 days, Yellow = 30-59 days, Red = <30 days	<input type="radio"/>			
COVID-19 testing capability for River Falls residents: Green = testing in the City, Yellow = testing in region	<input type="radio"/>			

VII. City of River Falls Phased Recovery Planning

A. Municipal Facilities* - UPDATED Feb. 18, 2021

	Safer at Home**	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
City Hall	Closed: open by appointment only	Open w/social distancing controls	Open w/social distancing controls	Open
Park bathroom facilities	Open, use at own risk	Open, use at own risk	Open, use at own risk	Open
City playgrounds/sporting courts	Use at own risk; no groups	Open, ≤10 w/ social distancing Use at own risk	Open, w/ social distancing, use at own risk	No restrictions
Dog Park	Open, ≤10 w/ social distancing, use at own risk	Open, ≤25w/ social distancing and capacity limits	Open w/social distancing	No restrictions
City campground	Closed	Self-contained camping only	Open for same household groups on any one site	No restrictions
City swimming pool	Closed	Open for lessons, ≤10	Open w/ adherence to public health recommendations. Limited capacity likely.	TBD
Splashpad	Closed	Open, <10 Use at own risk	Open w/ adherence to public health recommendations.	No restrictions
Park (open-air) shelters	Use at own risk for families/households; must be ≤ 10, no reservations	Open with social distancing	Open with social distancing	No restrictions
Glen Park Shelter	Closed	Open w/ adherence to public health capacity limits.	Open w/ adherence to public health capacity limits.	No restrictions
Hoffman Park Shelter	Closed	Open w/ adherence to public health capacity limits.	Open w/ adherence to public health capacity limits.	
Open-space parks	Open w/ social distancing	Open w/ social distancing	Open w/social distancing	No restrictions
Library general	Closed; curbside, contactless pickup and returns only	May be opened for limited individualized services; circulation is curbside and contactless only.	Open with posted capacity limits that meet, or may be less than, public health capacity limits.	Open
Library Computer Room	Closed	TBD	Open with posted capacity limits that meet, or may be less than, public health capacity limits.	Open
Library gallery	Closed	Closed	Open with posted capacity limits that	Open

			meet, or may be less than, public health capacity limits.	
Library meeting rooms	Closed	Closed	Open with posted capacity limits that meet, or may be less than, public health capacity limits.	Open

Table 1

**For the latest on openings and closures, visit www.rfcity.org/COVID19*

***The state's Safer at Home order was overturned on May 13, 2020.*

B. Municipal Operations* - UPDATED Feb. 18, 2021

	Safer at Home**	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Social distancing	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Respiratory etiquette	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Staying home when sick	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alternative/remote worksites for staff	Required unless exception approved	Required unless exception approved	Permitted; may be preferred depending on position/dept. specific.	Permitted
Worksite considerations	On site staff should maintain 6' distancing at all times. If possible, seating should avoid facing one another be as far apart as is possible and practical. Consider using walls/barriers and alternating of personnel (remote vs. onsite) when possible.			
Work-related travel restrictions	City limits or utility service territory	Western WI and MSP MSA; all others require prior approval.	Case-by-Case review for travel outside of Western WI and MSP MSA. Remote work upon return may be necessary.	No restrictions
Group meetings/gatherings	Remote only	≤ 10; virtual encouraged	Virtual encouraged, w/ social distancing and adherence to public health capacity limits.	No restrictions
City Council	Two per month, remote	Two per month, remote	Two per month, remote and/or with social distancing encouraged	No restrictions
Boards/committees	If needed, remote only	If needed, primarily remote	TBD based on specific considerations relating to each board/committee/ commission	No restrictions
Training classes/events	Online/remote only	Online/remote or static participation with ≤10 and social distancing	Virtual encouraged, w/ social distancing and adherence to public health capacity limits.	No restrictions
Public engagements by City staff	None	Online/remote or static participation with ≤10 and social distancing	Virtual encouraged, w/ social distancing and adherence to public health capacity limits	No restrictions
Non-emergency meter changeouts	Suspended	With approval; electric only	Yes, with customer screening questionnaire, PPE, and social distancing	No restrictions
Recreational programming	Suspended	Possible for smaller programs w/ social distancing	Permitted based on public health guidelines.	No restrictions
City coordinated group sports/sports leagues	Suspended	Suspended	Permitted based on public health guidelines.	TBD

Rec Day Camps	Suspended	≤10 and social distancing	Permitted based on public health guidelines.	No restrictions
Large item cleanup, drop-off event	Postponed	With modifications	With modifications	No restrictions
Compost Site	Open, social distancing; no take-out or wood splitting	Open; take-out and wood splitting not recommended	No restrictions	No restrictions

Table 2

**For the latest on openings and closures, visit www.rfcity.org/COVID19*

***The state's Safer at Home order was overturned on May 13, 2020.*

In addition, and unless otherwise indicated, the following actions or considerations should be noted regarding events in public spaces within the City, or for those events and activities that receive City staff and/or resource support.

Events	Safer at Home	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Festivals/parades	Will not be authorized	Will not be authorized	TBD based on current public health guidelines and restrictions	TBD
Sporting events/runs	Will not be authorized	Likely will not be authorized		TBD
Spectator activities	Will not be authorized	Will not be authorized		TBD

Table 3

C. Communications

The City’s Communications Department will provide COVID-19 related official information and resources. This will primarily be accomplished via the City’s website and Facebook pages.

Other communications include, but are not limited to:

- Weekly updates from the Mayor to the community
- Twice monthly Administrator's reports to the Council and community
- Formal resolutions passed by the City Council

Official information sources cited will include St. Croix and Pierce County public health departments; Wisconsin Department of Health Services; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Other sources may be utilized with the approval of the city administrator or his designee.

D. Enforcement Philosophy

Community or staff concerns about compliance with COVID-19-related emergency orders would rarely, if ever, be of an emergent nature. These non-emergency type questions, concerns, or complaints should be directed to the county’s public health office or the City of River Falls Police Department non-emergency telephone line.

The Police Department is committed to working in partnership with the community to find solutions to community problems through their proactive outreach, community education, and neighborhood advocacy efforts. In terms of COVID-19, the preference is to gain voluntary compliance, through collaboration and education, prior to enforcement.

Violations of emergency orders that are either too egregious, or are unable to be resolved via voluntary compliance, may result in enforcement actions. The Police Department has discretionary authority under the leadership of the police chief to pursue formal enforcement through the county district attorney’s office. Public health officials also have enforcement authority granted to them.

E. Business Community Considerations

The City is proud to partner with its thriving business community and remains unwavering in its support during these difficult times. Initiatives that have been implemented to support the business community include:

- Collaboration with the River Falls Chamber of Commerce in developing and maintaining the Chamber's Business Resource webpage
- Partnering with the River Falls Chamber of Commerce and support the River Falls Recovery Committee to assess the local economy and assist the business community with the transition through phases
- Establishment of 30-minute parking zones on Main Street to enable curbside takeout and pickup
- Proactive outreach contacts to more than 200 businesses
- Connecting with banks to assess the local impact of the Payment Protection Program (PPP)
- Drafting and implementing a local Revolving Recovery Loan Program

In anticipation of eventual recovery, businesses, as well as non-profits and the faith-based community, should prepare to implement new business practices and social distancing measures in consultation with public health officials. Pierce County Public Health has created a toolkit⁷ available to the community; it can be accessed from the Chamber's Business Resource webpage.

F. Fiscal Strategy During Pandemic Response

Future financial sustainability continues to be a cornerstone of the City's organizational foundation and, while some of the strategic initiatives have shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus on future financial sustainability has not. The City Council had the foresight to be financially prepared for contingencies by:

- Ensuring adequate unassigned general fund reserves
- Pursuing diverse revenue sources
- Maintaining an excellent credit rating

This has afforded the City the ability to make thoughtful, methodic, and strategic decisions as the local and statewide economic impacts continue to unfold. The goal is not only to be able to weather the current economic storm but to position the City for future long-term sustainable growth once the downturn recedes. This will be accomplished by short-term cash management including rebalancing of the 2020 budget and CIP plan, and ongoing liquidity and debt analysis across all funds.

The City will continue to make investments that support continued development of housing and industrial expansions and those that best position us for economic recovery as the pandemic impacts recede.

⁷ Pierce County Business toolkit available from: https://www.co.pierce.wi.us/Public%20Health/PDF/Publications_Data/Business-Toolkit.pdf

G. Modified Strategic Initiatives

The magnitude of COVID-19 and impacts to the City will require modifications to planned strategic initiatives and related work plans. The revised interim strategic initiatives and supporting goals are indicated beneath each focus area in this section. Some of the originally planned strategic initiatives for the 2019-2021 period will now be delayed and some may be potentially reconsidered altogether.

- **Deliver Quality Public Safety Services**
 - Develop continuity of operational plans and personal protective equipment plans for long-term sustained COVID-19 responses
 - Transition EMS to Allina Health EMS organization by Jan. 1, 2021
 - Implement remodel of 2815 Prairie Drive for police station

- **Support the Local Business Community and Economy**
 - Participate and assist the River Falls Chamber of Commerce's River Falls Recovery Committee
 - Monitor economic health of the community through business engagement, metrics, and business funding sources
 - Assist local businesses through a City-sponsored business loan fund
 - Provide a seamless development review process, keeping the City open for economic development
 - Participate and assist in coordinating with cities and counties in a regional recovery plan
 - Develop funding strategy for Mann Valley Corporate Park

- **Connect the Community**
 - Develop and maintain a centralized source of COVID-19 resources and information for the public
 - Continue to provide essential municipal services in a safe and efficient manner that incorporates any social distancing control measures
 - Implement community feedback surveys
 - Assist UWRF with modifications to the 2020-2021 school year

- **Maintain Infrastructure and Provide Safe Utilities**
 - Cooperate with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation on 35/65 and Division St. Project
 - Evaluate West Central Bio Solids partnership
 - Implement a revised phasing plan for the North Interceptor Sewer
 - Continue implementing the Advanced Metering Infrastructure project for electric utility

- **Ensure Organizational Resilience**
 - Rebalance 2020 budget
 - Develop 2021-2022 budget
 - Manage near-term cashflow with ongoing liquidity and debt analysis
 - Reprioritize and adjust 2020-2021 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
 - Develop 2022-2027 CIP

- Conduct a cost of service study and update electric rates for 2020 implementation
- Provide a support network to employees to recover from COVID-19 impacts

The following 2019-2021 strategic initiatives will be delayed to 2022 and possibly reconsidered.

- Develop implementation strategy for Fire Department facility
- Implement AMI for water utility
- Create strategic plan for the Library
- Update Downtown Master Plan
- Assist UWRF with new science facility and coordinated public infrastructure improvements at 2nd St. and Cascade Ave.
- Update Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Implement Street Light Utility Project

The following 2019-2021 strategic initiatives have been completed:

- Complete and implement a class and compensation study
- Conduct an assessment of EMS services; analyze feasibility and options
- Evaluate and implement the campus corridor plan for infill development
- Conduct the 2019 citizen satisfaction survey

VIII. Principles and Approaches to Recovery

When the City begins the process of reopening, it will be important to approach recovery in a systematic way that aligns with our strategic initiatives. Parallel to those initiatives, staff has developed an initial series of principles to guide our recovery.

- **Adaptability in the face of change and uncertainty:** As an organization, we will act nimbly and adapt current services to meet the needs of the community amid rapid change.
- **Capitalize on opportunities for improvement:** Use COVID-19 response as a way to improve processes that can apply beyond the recovery phase and become permanent changes to the way we do business.
- **Remove barriers:** Address existing regulatory barriers to allow the community to recover more quickly.
- **Apply lessons learned in response:** Create frameworks that allow River Falls to better manage future crises and community disruptions.
- **Align, collaborate, and innovate with partners:** Collaborative systems will help our partners better navigate current and future crises while developing stronger bonds that will help the community recover together.

IX. Conclusion

The City of River Falls is committed to supporting the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. This plan provides reentry guidelines specific to River Falls as it moves out of Phase I status and into Phase II. We pledge to work diligently with our community, business, and county partners to find solutions that move us incrementally forward while operating within recommended guidelines. As guidelines change, we will adapt using the outline contained here, as modified from time-to-time by the Mayor and Council.

As we look toward the next six months and beyond, City staff will continue to focus on the City's core functions, guided by principles that include flexibility, adaptability, innovation, and collaboration. At the same time, we will continue to meet the goals outlined in the City's 2019-2021 strategic plan. This will ensure that, when this pandemic recedes, we have made the progress necessary to keep our City not only functioning but ready for future growth and development.

This plan cannot be accomplished without the support of our community. We are beyond saddened by the hardships our residents and businesses have endured during this pandemic, but are so grateful for your patience, diligence, and willingness to protect and care for one another. We are a resilient, caring community and will get through this time together.