



CORONAVIRUS AND PANDEMIC ACTION PLAN

After I announced that I was exploring a possible run for mayor in late February, I set out and started talking with as many Richmonders as I could. Very early on, I spoke with one woman who was very concerned about the Coronavirus and asked how I would be handling it. This was a few weeks before the dangers of the virus went mainstream and we started locking down. She was definitely ahead of the game.

I told her that I had been following the updates and that my philosophy is that as the mayor the way you should handle it is to plan for the worst. Over prepare. Be vigilant. Most importantly be proactive in preparations. You want to be ready if this thing is as bad as it seems to be in China. That means start learning everything you can about it. Get the top medical experts in the area together to discuss it. Coordinate with VCU Health to get their opinion and what preparations they may be taking. Then take that information and start preparing the city government to respond if it comes. When you are the mayor, you always take the potential health and welfare of the people seriously. If it turns out to be nothing that is fine. Better to be overprepared and not need it, than underprepared and not have it.

That is generally how I operate. I take things seriously. I dig into the details. I am constantly learning, studying, and working to improve. You can see that from my work on NoColiseum.com.

That is why I put together this document to show how I would have prepared for and approached responding to the Coronavirus pandemic.

I highly value the principal of being proactive. In life you either are anticipatory in planning so you can take control of change or you wait for change to happen and be forced to react to things happening to you.

In this document you will see how I think. It is broken down into mostly bullet points because I am a man of lists. I plan out the things that need to be done and then go about taking action to get each line item accomplished.

This document is separated into three parts, each corresponding to a timeframe. They are (1) Preparation, (2) Active Local Outbreak, and (3) Demobilization and Recovery. Within each are several points of action to be taken. This list would be a starting point to work with the heads of departments and experts that then would be adjusted, added to, and expanded upon.

I hope it gives you a view into not only how I would be handling this crisis but tackling all of the important issues in Richmond.

-Justin Griffin

PREPARATION

1. Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan.
 - a. Upon taking office I would initiate a comprehensive review of all emergency preparedness and response plans. Because it is normal in business (not that all businesses actually do this) to assess potential threats to your business, I assumed all governments had completed emergency plans. After 9/11 at the very least there should be emergency plans. Living on the east coast in a city that has to have floodwalls, you would think there would be some sort of emergency plans that could at least be adapted to work in this situation. We clearly do not have that. The saying “a failure to plan is a plan to fail” is absolutely true. The constant reactionary policy making, uncertainty, and lack of a coherent plan of attack must never happen again.
 - b. For certain potential events the city should have an emergency plan on the books that can be dusted off if needed. These events include natural disasters (hurricanes, flooding, blizzard, earthquake), pandemics, terrorist attack, and nuclear attack on Washington D.C.
 - c. These plans would lay out step-by-step what needs to be done with triggers for when they should be initiated. All areas from community communication and coordination to emergency operations to medical surge needs would be considered. There would not be a delay in identifying overflow capacity for hospitals because those sites would already long be on the books with back up sites if those are unavailable because of the emergency. The plan would just need to be followed and adjusted to respond to what is happening on the ground.

Now I will do a little looking back. I know you can say this has the benefit of hindsight but as I said in the beginning in my response to the worried resident, when you are in charge and there is a potential threat you must take it seriously and overprepare.

2. When first reports happened in China.
 - a. Double check the already established pandemic plan to make sure it is up-to-date with proper healthcare contacts and community organization contacts. If one doesn't exist, scramble to make plans.
 - b. Assign someone to monitor the situation and provide me updates.
 - c. Learn all we can about the disease.
 - i. Is there a test?
 - ii. How contagious is it?
 - iii. How deadly is it?
 - iv. What are the symptoms?
 - v. What are the unique issues it presents?
 - d. Remind those running the overflow site that it may be needed. This should be a yearly check-in at flu season anyway.
3. As it got worse in China - Chinese Lockdown and First US Case.
 - a. Notify all department heads to develop plans for worst case scenarios. What do they need?
 - b. Connect with VCU Health to get their opinion on how to respond when it makes it to Virginia. Ask what we can do to help them prepare. Keep lines of communication open.
 - c. Connect with other area hospitals and county governments to check on their preparations. See if there is anything that can be done more efficiently by working together.

- d. Evaluate how countries close to the epicenter are responding.
- e. Connect with federal and state governments to see what their plans are. This allows the city to know what slack it may have to pick up. By learning from the successful approach of South Korea we would know to ask (1) Do they have a test that can be disseminated for mass production?; (2) Are they planning on tracking the travel of those that have recently traveled to/from infected regions so those people can be quarantined and those that have been in contact with that person can be notified and self-quarantine?
- f. Start lining up contracts and resources to prep the overflow site, so they are ready to go if needed. Put the overflow site on stand-by.
- g. Connect with medical volunteer organizations. ESAR-VHP and MRC Health Professionals such as NVOAD.
- h. Identify at-risk populations. Assess and plan for access and functional needs of at-risk individuals.
- i. Connect with community resources/partners/organizations.
 - i. Community advocacy organizations
 - ii. Faith-based organizations
 - iii. Academic institutions
 - iv. Professional associations
 - v. Health care organizations
 - vi. Community service organizations
 - vii. Volunteer programs and organizations

ACTIVE LOCAL OUTBREAK

As I said at the beginning, I understand that there is the potential for some of the things in my “Preparation” phase that are included with the benefit of hindsight at this point. A basic pandemic plan being in place would have covered all of those action items, but I have no problem admitting that none of us are perfect. It is fine to make mistakes, but the urgency with which you correct those mistakes speaks volumes. If there was anything that wasn’t completed before the outbreak became serious, then I would have moved at a frantic pace to make sure we got caught up and prepared. The seriousness became evident here in America and Virginia on March 7th. On March 6th, it was announced that 21 people aboard the Grand Princess cruise ship had been diagnosed with COVID-19. On March 7th, Virginia had its first confirmed case.

Unfortunately, it took until April 3rd for an overflow medical site to even be selected here in Richmond. That is almost 4 weeks after the first case in Virginia was identified. At no time during those 4 weeks, even as we were issuing stay-at-home orders, did we find urgency to prepare for the medical needs of Richmonders. Additionally, the site won’t even be ready for another 6 weeks. That is 69 days or two months and 8 days after the first diagnosed case. That is inexcusable. Richmond got very lucky there wasn’t an immediate surge of critical care cases.

1. Complete anything that was not completed in the Preparation section.
2. Identify top priorities that must be addressed. Only by identifying the root problems can you respond with effective action.
 - a. Elderly and immunocompromised are particularly vulnerable.
 - i. Work with community partners to establish supply delivery programs for elderly and immunocompromised individuals. Distancing and stay-at-home orders are limited in effect if we send the most vulnerable to crowded grocery stores.

- c. Department of Social Services should be heavily involved in providing support to those effected and their families.
- d. Coordinate community resources to support medical workers, daycare workers, elderly care workers.
 - i. This means get or make as much personal protective equipment as possible.
- e. Direct support to individuals.
 - i. Housing Payment Assistance Program.
 - 1. \$500 one-time payment to help newly unemployed pay rent or mortgage.
- f. Direct support to businesses.
 - i. Establish Small Business Relief Fund
 - 1. The current \$1 million small business loan program instituted by Mayor Stoney is not good enough. Small businesses having to take on more debt just to make payments on their current debt will not set them up for success during this time or after it is over. These should be grants and forgivable zero-interest-rate loans. The fund should be larger than \$1 million. If we can find over \$1 million to pay advisors to review the arena plan, we can do better for our small businesses.
 - g. Identify first responder risks. Support and train to mitigate risk.
- 5. Further plan for fallout from stay-at-home orders.
 - a. The longer people must stay at home and businesses are closed, the more problems that will arise. As we approach 30 days staying at home, we will start to see supply chain issues. With many workers calling out and the inability to bring in temporary workers to harvest crops, food and supplies will start being hard to replenish.
- 6. Monitor Needs.
 - a. Stay connected with community partners with two-way communications.
 - b. Routinely monitor bed availability and assess staffing needs. Begin process of recruiting, coordinating, and training volunteers. If needed notify, assemble, and deploy those volunteers.
- 7. Establish avenues for public information and resources.
 - a. City 311 system and City website should become an easy place where resources can be found and needs can be relayed from residents to the city.
 - b. Social media. Obtain specific handles so people can easily set notifications to be alerted.
- 8. Set priorities and goals.
 - a. Develop metrics and goals so the public can determine what is and isn't good news. Set timeframes for social distancing and stay at home orders. People are more likely to abide by such orders if they know it is for a designated period of time. You can always extend if needed. Indefinite timeframes make it more likely to be ignored by some.
- 9. Address budget issues.
 - a. Stop all discretionary and non-essential spending.
 - b. Identify changes needed in the budget as a result of closures and stay-at-home orders. The debt for the three new schools being built is specifically tied to meals tax revenue. How will that debt be paid with no meals tax revenue?
- 10. Proactively plan for recovery.
 - a. The biggest problem with politicians is that they are reactionary. They only address things that are immediately in front of them. They fail to proactively plan for the future. As we have seen our elected leaders failed to be proactive in planning for the potential pandemic, we cannot let the same thing happen for the recovery. The places that are sowing the seeds for recovery now, will

see the quickest return to normalcy. If you can be up and functioning before everyone else, then you will see the most economic recovery and growth.

- b. Begin planting the seed for tourists.
 - i. There is no promotion of tourism going on right now, so the city would have clear channels of advertising to promote. Many of the people who have been able to keep working will be looking for opportunities to get away, particularly for weekends, once distancing requirements are lifted. Show them Richmond is not overcrowded, it has plenty of local restaurants, plenty of outdoor activities that still allow for milder distancing, and can be experienced in a long weekend. Businesses, organizations, and cities that use this time to stay front of mind will see a quicker recovery than those that disappear during this time.

DEMOBILIZATION AND RECOVERY

1. What needs to be in place before demobilization can begin (reopening). This should be a phased approach where certain segments of society begin to reopen but with precautions such as limited capacity and social distancing measures in place.
 - a. Robust testing capabilities
 - i. Currently Virginia is lagging behind the rest of the country in testing.
 - b. Contact tracing system
 - c. Establish a hospital surge capacity site
 - d. Meet PPE demand
 - e. System in place for supplying the most vulnerable
2. Tax policy to help individuals.
 - a. We need to lower property tax rates or have a property tax relief program for the second half of 2020. Current real estate assessments were established before the pandemic when the economy was booming. Lowering rates will help reflect our new economic reality and put money back in the pockets of residents.
 - b. **DO NOT RAISE WATER RATES.** Mayor Stoney's current budget proposal includes yet another increase in water rates. Our water rates are already some of the highest in the country. These high-water rates disproportionately harm the same people who are harmed the most by this pandemic. Raising water rates right now should be out of the question. (Update: as of 4/13 the city has pulled back the rate increase proposal).
3. Help small business.
 - a. Make our business license rates competitive with the surrounding counties. Starting a business in the city is exponentially more difficult and more expensive. We need to simplify the process and lower the rates to be equal to Henrico and Chesterfield. The total tax amount calculation should also include a \$300,000 deduction to match Chesterfield.
 - b. Launch Restaurant Relaunch Program
 - i. On top of having to reenter a market where people will be slow to return to their normal eating out ways, restaurants are going to have a lot of costs to cover to get restarted.

They will have to replace their entire food stock and not every employee will return so they will have to do a lot of training.

- ii. Provide non-franchise restaurants in the city limits with a loan that is forgiven on meeting certain requirements such as opening, employing a certain number of workers based on employment prior to shut down, and staying open for a certain period of time.

We must do everything we can to survive this time and then prepare ourselves to thrive when this is over. If we focus on recovery and have a plan when nobody else in the country does, Richmond will come roaring back better than it was before.