

BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY
EMERGENCY CLOSURE & PANDEMIC POLICY

I. General

A. Emergency Closure definition: the library building is closed during normal business hours for a short duration. There is an assumption that staff will return to the building after the event or crisis. Examples are weather-related such as a storm, utility outage, or insufficient staffing levels.

B. Pandemic Closure definition: the library building is closed during normal business hours for an extended period due to a pandemic or epidemic crisis. Recovery and re-opening may be slow, as compared to an emergency closure. There may be service restrictions and/or limited hours of operation.

1. For the purposes of this policy, the term Pandemic also includes Epidemic or other local health concern.

C. Groups: in the event of emergency or pandemic closure, all library programs, special events, and meeting room reservations will be cancelled.

II. Emergency Closure

A. At the Library Director's discretion, the library may be closed for dangerous weather, electrical outage or HVAC outages, or lack of minimum staffing levels. This may be for several hours to several days.

1. Minimum staffing: Minimum staffing level is defined as two healthy employees available to be present at the library during all open hours.

B. If at any time the Library must close for reasons beyond staff control, staff scheduled for that day will be paid all or the remainder of the hours they were scheduled (Employee Handbook 2024).

C. Communication

1. To the public: in the event of closure, effective communication about any reduction in services or open hours must be announced in a timely manner. The Library Director or designee should follow the normal procedure that includes posting on wmur.com, social media, and the library website and library marquee.

2. Groups scheduled to use the meeting room will be notified of the closure.

3. During closure or reduction in operating hours, the Library Director or designee will maintain communication with staff and Library Board of Trustees.

D. Re-opening: at such time that the emergency event has been resolved, the Library Director will re-open the Library.

III. Pandemic Closure

A. Circumstances for Closure

1. **Public Health Mandate:** the Library will close in the event of a mandate order or recommendation for closure issued by public health or government officials at any level.
2. **School Closure:** in the event that Bethlehem public schools close due to pandemic, the library will also close.
3. **Insufficient staffing levels:** at the notification of the Library Director, the Library Board of Trustees may close the Library, reduce its operating hours, or limit services temporarily in the event that there is not sufficient staff to maintain appropriate staffing levels or if unable to maintain adequate social distancing for health and safety.

B. Staff

1. If the Library closes for an extended period of time, staff will be paid the amount of that time allocated in that year's Library budget.
 - a) The Treasurer will inform the Town's Payroll Clerk of the number of hours staff should be paid, in lieu of timecards.
2. **Minimum staffing:** Minimum staffing level is defined as two healthy employees available to be present at the library during all open hours. An inability to maintain this level may result in reduced hours or closing the Library.
3. **Health and Safety of Staff:** to provide service safely and efficiently, the following actions may be taken at the discretion of the Library Director or designee.
 - a) Increased health/safety measures for staff (e.g., wearing of gloves, masks, wiping down work areas, etc.);
 - b) Restricted public access to areas in the library (e.g., closing unmonitored areas for safety);
 - c) Social distancing practices in public areas;
 - d) Reallocation of employee responsibilities and shift/schedule changes to provide coverage during open hours;

C. Expectations of Staff

1. If the Library is open, staff shall report to work on time as scheduled, excluding any excused absences.
 - a) If an employee refuses to report back to work due to safety concerns, the Library Director, at their discretion, may place the employee on furlough.

2. If the Library is closed to the public, staff may be asked to work on projects in the building that do not involve interacting with the public.

- a) Staff may work with others in the library, practicing social distancing.
- b) Staff may work alone in the building.

3. If the Library is closed to the public, healthy employees may be assigned work-at-home or staff development tasks to complete during their compensated hours.

- a) When appropriate, staff may take work tools (e.g., laptops, supplies, etc.) home for work-at-home assignments.
- b) Since work-at-home is fundamentally different from working at the Library, Trustees do not expect staff to work the same number of hours as usually scheduled, though they will be paid for budgeted hours per B.1. above.
- c) Staff will record hours and nature of work at home, and turn in record to Library Director periodically.

B. Communication

- 1. To the public: in the event of closure necessitated by pandemic, effective communication about any reduction in services or open hours must be announced in a timely manner. The Library Director or designee should follow the normal procedure that includes posting on wmur.com, social media, and the library website and library marquee.
- 2. Groups scheduled to use the meeting room will be notified of the closure.
- 3. During closure or reduction in operating hours, the Library Director or designee will maintain communication with staff and Library Board of Trustees.

D. Prioritization of Services

- 1. Priority will be given to the following essential services while the library is closed:
 - a) Reference and information services to the public, via phone and online
 - b) Payroll
 - c) Accounts Payable
 - d) Facility Maintenance
 - e) Materials ordering
 - f) Cataloging

In the case of reduced staffing or reduced hours of operation, the Library Director or designee will prioritize service-related tasks and assign the daily work plan to staff.

E. Materials Handling

1. While the Library is closed due to a pandemic, materials returned in the book drop will be handled as follows
 - a) Emptying the book drop will be done at intervals so that it does not overflow.
 - b) Staff emptying the book drop will wear gloves and cleanse hands thoroughly afterward.
 - c) Staff will wear gloves while materials are checked in. Materials will be quarantined on the book cart or other area for a sufficient amount of time until deemed safe from germs, and will then be shelved or put on the reserve shelf. (This process will follow public health recommendations)
2. Materials reserved while the Library is closed will remain on the reserve shelf, and the patron contacted when the library re-opens.
3. Inter-library loans to go back to the lending libraries will remain in the bin until the service resumes.

F. Re-Opening

1. The Library Board of Trustees has sole authority to re-open the Library after a Pandemic.
 - a) The Trustees may take into consideration recommendations of government officials, or the re-opening of the schools, but these do not necessarily correlate to the library re-opening.
 - b) Complete Re-Opening: the Library Board of Trustees may re-open the library completely, with no restrictions of movement in the building or reduction in services. No restrictions on patron computer use. Meeting room use and programming may resume.
2. Phased Re-Opening: the Library Board of Trustees may re-open the library in phases, in order to keep patrons and staff safe. This may include:
 - a) Curbside Service: patrons reserve materials through OPAC, email, or phone call. Staff brings materials outside where patrons retrieve them.
 - b) Limited Entry: staff will limit the number of patrons (a percentage of total capacity) allowed in the building at one time. Patrons may choose materials themselves. Patrons may not linger, sit and read, or use patron computers. Patrons will be required to wear masks at all times.
 - c) Unrestricted Entry: the number of patrons will no longer be limited, as long as social distancing is observed. Patrons may stay and read for short periods. Patron computers may be used for short periods. Patrons may be asked to wear masks at all times.
 - d) Phased Re-Opening will eventually end with a complete Re-Opening.

- e) The Trustees may modify and incorporate any parts of the above phases or other phases not listed, at their discretion.
- 3. At all times until Complete Re-Opening, staff will be provided with appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE), which may include masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant, and disposable gloves.
- 4. At all times until Complete Re-Opening, staff will use standard precautions to protect patrons. This includes wiping circulation desk surfaces, doorknobs, bathrooms, and patron computers with disinfectant. (This may also include any additional recommendations provided through public health guidance).

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