


City of Bowie

2614 Kenhill Drive
Bowie, Maryland 20715

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council 

From: David J. Deutsch, City Manager

Subject: February 2010 Snowstorms Critique

Date: March 16, 2010

Overview

The February 2010 snowstorms presented unique challenges to Bowie residents, businesses and City employees. The record snowfalls, occurring while snow was still on the ground from the December 18/19, 2009 snowstorm, were a test of the City's ability to continue essential functions and provide for the safety of our residents during extreme conditions.

The City enacted portions of its Emergency Operations Plan, particularly in the areas of communications and snow removal policies (see Attachment A). Liaison and situational awareness status with other entities throughout the entire National Capital Region (NCR) were maintained throughout the storm through our membership in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG).

The plowing of City streets was clearly a priority. The City has 185 miles of City maintained roadways. This includes 856 separate streets, of which several hundred contain cul-de-sacs, which are more time consuming when plowing compared to a straight street or roadway. Also within City limits are 17 miles of State and US highways, and 15 miles of County roads. The Public Works Department was responsible for the plowing of City streets and worked with County and State officials to resolve dangerous conditions and problem areas on their roads.

The cost of our response to the snowstorms was also historic. Detailed records of all labor, equipment and contractor costs were kept. The City is optimistic that a significant portion of the approximately \$562,000 of documented expenses will be reimbursed by the Federal government. In addition, the City is still pursuing the possibility of reimbursement for the December 2009 storm. Although the City is not eligible for

reimbursement under the current Federal guidelines for the December storm (due to inaccurate snow depth measurements by the Federal government), an appeal to the Federal Emergency Management Agency is in process.

Employee Critique

A critique of the City's response to the February snowstorms was held on March 10, 2010. Twenty-five City employees representing all City departments and all levels of responsibility attended. The format was informal and all participants were encouraged to comment and present issues to be discussed. The perspectives (and recommendations) expressed during the critique as well as other observations are summarized below.

Public Works Policy on Plowing

The Public Works Department has an operational procedure regarding the treatment and plowing of City streets. This information is posted in the Public Works section of the website (see Attachment A) and is reiterated by articles in the *Bowie Spotlight*. However, many residents are unaware of the policy. Since City employees spent an inordinate amount of time explaining the operational procedure to emailers and callers, it was suggested that the City website display this information more prominently before and during a storm.

Public Works uses "checkers" to survey the progress of plowing by employees and contractors. During the storm, these checkers' progress was occasionally inhibited by poor conditions. The City will consider cross-training other employees to help accomplish this task.

Snow Emergency Routes

Vehicles parked on the street during a snowstorm inhibit plowing and create dangerous conditions. As defined by City Code, a snow emergency exists when snow and ice reach an accumulation of two or more inches (see Attachment B). Parking of vehicles on the streets is prohibited during snow emergencies. Before the storm, the City Code Compliance Officers placed notices on cars on major drives and streets reminding them to move the cars into driveways (see Attachment C). The City also relaxed the rules about parking on the grass, thus helping clear the streets for plowing. In addition, after the snow had stopped, Code Compliance Officers left reminder notices for residents where sidewalks had not been cleared, particularly near schools (see Attachment D).

There is a priority list for sidewalk snow removal by the Parks and Grounds Division (see Attachment E). There were some problems with plowing contractors pushing snow onto sidewalks that had been cleared. Public Works will work with the contractors to minimize snow on sidewalks when loaders are used to widen certain streets.

It was suggested that the City's Public Safety Committee examine the current policies for enforcement and towing of vehicles parked on snow emergency routes.

City Equipment

It is generally felt that the City has enough appropriate equipment to respond to an emergency event such as the February snowstorms, particularly with the use of contractors (see Attachment F). One possible deficiency may be in the lack of skid steer loaders which are particularly useful in smaller parking lots such as townhome areas. The City will investigate contracting for additional equipment on a standby basis. The other deficiency is the scarcity of four-wheel drive vehicles throughout the organization that could be used to transport employees during severe snowstorms. The number of four-wheel drive vehicles is sufficient for typical winter storms.

Contractors

During the height of the storm, we had 40 pieces of equipment working at one time. Public Works tracks the operation with the use of a tally board. Staff will explore means of electronically maintaining this information with the use of GIS based technology. The contractors are very pleased with the expedited manner in which the City pays them, and some of the contractors indicated that was one of the reasons they chose to work for Bowie.

Public Utilities

There were some scattered electrical outages, primarily during the first storm on February 6th when heavy snow and winds created conditions conducive to power outages. However, the BGE work associated with the Bowie Electric Reliability Action Plan (BERAP) had a very positive impact in reducing the number of outages the City would have normally experienced in a storm of this magnitude. In total, approximately 1,500 Bowie residents suffered power outages of some duration with the most outages at one time being approximately 850. However, most of these outages were restored within hours, even with the difficult working conditions. The City did experience an electrical outage at our Wastewater Treatment Plant. This outage resulted in a spill that was reported to the Maryland Department of the Environment and the County Health Department and was treated by the spreading of lime. The receiving stream was not affected, as the spill was contained on site. The generator that is being installed at the Wastewater Treatment Plant that would have prevented this situation from occurring was unfortunately not yet operational. We expect this generator to be fully operational shortly so that we should not experience this situation in the future.

Communications

Communications with residents about the snowstorms began on Thursday, February 4th, 24 hours before the first snow flakes fell, and continued through Friday, February 12th.

The first message explained the City's snow removal policy, reminded residents to remove cars from streets, specified how information would be communicated during the storm, reminded residents to prepare for the storm and provided various means for sharing their concerns or questions. Subsequent messages issued over the 10-day period, provided regular updates to the public via Alert Bowie, the website, a recorded message on the phone system, and the Bowie government channel. Updates contained information about closings, the progress of the plowing and reminders about clearing sidewalks and fire hydrants. It was also important to use the updates to set expectations so that residents appreciated just how serious conditions were and how challenging the storm response was, given the back-to-back storms, the snowfall totals, and the fact that this snow was much heavier and more difficult to move than what fell in December.

Alert Bowie was a vital communications tool throughout the storm. More than 2,000 subscribers received our messages. Council and many others forwarded the messages to their friends and contacts in Bowie, making the reach of the messages even greater. The number of subscribers grew by 300 during the storm. During the 10 days of snowstorms and the response and recovery, more than 20 email and/or text message alerts were issued, updating subscribers about snow plowing, government closings, and specific traffic concerns. Alert Bowie was also one of the ways used to communicate closing information to employees during the storm.

Visits to the City website more than doubled during the snowstorms. The average number of daily visits is usually about 700. Between February 4th and February 12th, the average number of daily visits to our site ranged between 1,400 and 1,800 visits.

Residents also communicated with us during the storms. We had a very high volume of calls at City Hall and at Public Works. In fact, in February there were approximately 11,000 more calls to the City of Bowie than there were in January, which we can directly attribute directly to the storm. On the weekend of February 6-7, employees answered phones at both locations and relayed information to those in the field. We advertised use of snow@cityofbowie.org to report concerns. More than 1,000 emails were received over the 10-day period, reporting problem road conditions, some complimenting the City's response, and at least 50 messages from those living beyond our boundaries who thought Bowie provided their snow removal services.

Financial/Budget

The City spent approximately \$561,900 in response to the snowstorms. Contractual snow removal cost \$381,867, overtime for City employees was \$134,408, and salt/sand/etc. was \$45,625 (see Attachment G). Staff has submitted these costs through the appropriate channels for reimbursement under the Federal Stafford Act. In general, eligible entities can recoup 75% of their expenses that occurred during a designated 48-hour period of the storm. Staff has attended workshops regarding the procedures for properly submitting reimbursement requests. On April 5, staff will attend a MWCOG meeting that will review the storm response from a regional perspective.

Staff Recommendations

Due to the cooperation of the City residents, the preparation by all City departments, and the hard work of City employees, the effects of the snowstorms were kept to a minimum. Everyone was affected in some fashion. However, external comments received and our own internal critique leads to the following recommendations:

- Explore ways to ensure residents are better informed about snow removal policies and the prohibition regarding parking cars on the streets during snowstorms. Display such information more prominently on the City website prior to and during snowstorms.
- Consider cross-training City employees as “checkers” for Public Works snow routes.
- Continue to use Code Compliance Officers to place reminders about snow removal routes on vehicles on affected streets.
- Have the Public Safety Committee review the City’s policies on enforcement and towing of vehicles parked on snow emergency routes.
- Review current contracts for snow removal equipment for sufficiency, particularly skid steer loaders.
- Review the costs and benefits of purchasing additional four-wheel drive vehicles across the organization as current vehicles are replaced.
- Consider upgrading the technology infrastructure for tracking operational progress and resources during an emergency event.
- Devise a method for accurately measuring and documenting snowfall to bolster any future requests for reimbursements.

DJD/AC

cc: Public Safety Committee

Attachments

The following information is posted on the City of Bowie website:

Snow Removal

The City of Bowie is responsible for snow removal on all City maintained public streets. Responses to winter weather are categorized as follows:

Snow accumulation of less than 2 inches:

When roadways become slick due to snow, sleet, or ice, they are immediately treated with salt and/or sand. During treatment operations all main drives, steep hills, and collector streets (streets with numerous intersections) are treated on a priority basis. Streets with lesser inclines, most cul-de-sacs, and flat roads with limited intersections are not treated unless severe icing conditions occur. Limited plowing may take place on priority streets.

Snow accumulation of 2 inches or more:

When snow accumulations reach 2 inches, citywide plowing operations begin. Plowing operations begin with main drives and progresses to hilly areas and collector streets. During heavier snows plows will remain on priority streets until plowing outpaces accumulation. Plowing then progresses to streets with lesser inclines, roads with limited intersections, and cul-de-sacs. Citywide plowing continues until all streets have been plowed.

Severe Icing Conditions:

This condition is not meant to describe the presence of packed snow or ice in any one area. Severe icing conditions exist when all areas are coated with ice. An example would be an extended freezing rain event that coats roads, trees, and power lines. These events are often referred to as ice storms. When severe icing occurs response time increases due to downed power lines, fallen trees, and the need to respond to emergency situations. During ice storms streets not normally treated are given consideration and often receive treatment. The impending weather, maintenance of priority streets, and salt supply are given consideration when assessing additional treatment needs.

Jurisdiction:

City winter weather operations are confined to City maintained public streets. Some areas are comprised of private streets that are not maintained by the City. Most townhouse development streets fall into the category of private streets. In the few instances where the townhouse streets are public, the City will treat, plow and maintain the streets but not the parking areas. Additionally, the City does not treat, plow, or maintain any shopping centers. The townhouse homeowners association or management company are responsible for private areas.

Some streets within the City limits are maintained by other agencies. The following roads are maintained by Prince Georges County: Race Track Road, Old Chapel Road, Forest Drive, Mitchellville Road (south of MD 197), Chestnut Avenue (Route 564 to 6th Street), Chestnut Avenue (11th Street to Highbridge Road transition, Highbridge Road, Fletchertown Road, Mt. Oak Road (west of Mitchellville Rd.), Jericho Park Road, Church Road, Laurel-Bowie Road (6th Street to Route 197) and Hillmeade Road. Concerns regarding these streets must be reported to the Prince Georges County Public Works Office at 301-735-4653.

The following roads are maintained by the State of Maryland: Route 450; Route 197; Route 3/301; Route 564 (Lanham Severn Rd.); Route 50; Route 214 (Central Avenue) and Hall Road. All problems with these streets must be reported to the State Highway Administration at 301-513-7300. For additional information, call the Streets Office at 301-575-2472.

THE CODE

Sec. 14-17. Repossession of impounded vehicle.

Any vehicle impounded under the provisions of this Chapter may be repossessed by the owner or any other person duly authorized upon the payment to the City Manager or designee of the charges for impoundment and storage. (Sec. 14-17 amended by Ordinance O-8-05 effective 10/5/05).

Article IV. Snow Emergency.

Sec. 14-18. Snow emergencies.

The accumulation of snow and ice on the streets of the City in a depth of two (2) or more inches constitutes a snow emergency. Parking of vehicles on the streets of the City is prohibited during snow emergencies. The snow emergency shall remain in effect until snow accumulation has been cleared.

Sec. 14-19. Impoundment of vehicles obstructing, etc., street clearance.

The City Manager or his designee may take possession of and/or to remove any parked vehicle or abandoned vehicles that obstruct traffic or interfere with the clearance of snow and ice on any street within the City.

Sec. 14-20. Recoupment by City of costs of impounding, etc., obstructing vehicles.

To defray the cost of removing or towing any vehicle obstructing clearance under Section 14-19, the City Manager is hereby authorized to charge and collect a sum equal to an amount charged the City for towing, removal and storage of such vehicle.

Sec. 14-21. Impoundment postponed when snow accumulates after 10:00 p.m.

If the accumulation of the snow and ice takes place after 10:00 p.m., no vehicle will be towed away until after 8:00 a.m. of the following day. (Sec. 14-21 amended by O-05-92 effective 6/3/92).

Sec. 14-22. Removal of snow and ice accumulation from sidewalks and driveways.

(a) Every owner or lessor of residential and commercial property within the City fronting or abutting on a paved sidewalk or driveway which forms part of the public right-of-way shall remove and clear away, or cause to be removed and cleared away, snow and ice from said sidewalk or driveway.

(1) "Commercial" for purposes of this Section shall mean any property that is used to conduct a trade or business that provides goods or services to the public.

(2) Snow and ice shall be removed from the paved sidewalks or driveway public right-of-way within the City within forty eight (48) hours after the cessation of any fall of snow, sleet, or freezing rain.

(b) The City Manager may waive the provisions of this section for those residential property owners or lessors who because of the totality of their circumstances, considering such factors as age, physical handicap or disability, are unable to comply with the forty eight (48) hour requirement. Such waivers should be requested prior to November first and registered with the City Manager's office.

(c) Violations of this Section are municipal infractions subject to the penalty and enforcement provisions of Chapter 1, Sections 6 and 6A.



Due to the forecasted snowfall, we are urging vehicle owners to remove their vehicles from the street to assist in clearing the roadways.

For more information, please call

Bowie City Hall

301-262-6200.

February 16, 2010

Dear Resident,

In the interest of public safety, especially children walking to school, the City is requesting all residents clear their sidewalks of snow and/or ice immediately.

Chapter 14 of the Bowie City Code requires snow and ice be removed from paved sidewalks within forty-eight (48) hours after the cessation of any snow, sleet or freezing rain. Please note, the homeowner's responsibility for snow removal includes the public sidewalks in the front, side and rear of their property including that portion of the public sidewalk that traverses a driveway.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call the Code Compliance Office at Bowie City Hall, 301-809-3008 (8:30 AM – 5 PM) or 301-262-6200 (5 PM -10 PM).

Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated.



Snow Removal Schedule Sidewalks

- I. City Hall**
Walks, steps & ramps directly in front of the building
Walks & steps around building
Walks along Kenhill Drive & leading to City Hall
- II. Ice Arena**
Walks, steps & ramps around building
Walks from Northview (both sides of Drive)
- III. Senior Center**
Walks directly in front of the building
Walks around the building
Walks leading to building from parking lots & Health Center Drive
Walks leading to Gym
Walks along Health Center Drive out to Northview Drive
- IV. Gymnasium**
Walks directly in front of the Gym
Walks around the building
Walks leading from the parking lot to the building
Walks leading from Hospital Drive (both sides of Drive)
Walks along Northview Drive
- V. Belair Mansion**
Walks & steps directly in front of the building
Walks leading from the parking lots to the building
Walks along Tulip Grove Drive
Walks from Tulip Grove Drive towards building
- VI. Belair Stables**
Driveway
Walk along Belair Drive
Walks along building in courtyard
- VII. Playhouse** (if snow is on Fri, Sat, or Sun, this moves to #3)
All walks & steps leading into the building
- VIII. Railroad Museum**
Walks around museum & caboose
Walks out to Chestnut Avenue
- IX. Harmel House**
Walks from driveway to the house
Walks along Mount Oak & Mitchellville Road
- X. Tulip Grove House**
Driveway
Walk from driveway to the house
Walk along Tulip Grove Drive

Snow Removal Schedule Bike Paths



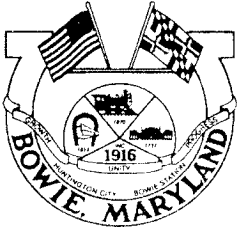
- I. Blacksox Park**
In & around park
Off of Mount Oak Road
Off of Artesian Lane
- II. Board of Education Property**
Off of Mitchellville Road
- III. Allen Pond Park**
Around pond & inside park
Along Northview Drive
Along Nottingham Drive
Along Mitchellville Road
- IV. Northview Drive**
From Nottingham to Evergreen Parkway
- V. Town Center Pond**
Around pond
Out to Everest Drive
Along Evergreen Parkway
- VI. Gym & Senior Center**
Paths from Gym to Senior Center
Paths along Health Center Drive from Gym to Health Center
- VII. Heather Hills**
Path along Old Collington Station Road from Route 197 to Route 50 bridge
- VIII. Route 197**
From Route 50 bridge to Route 450
- IX. Route 450**
From Freestate to Hilltop
- X. Whitmarsh Park**
Path from Route 450
Path from Stonybrook Drive
- XI. Dog Park**
Walk along Northview Drive
Inside gated area

Miscellaneous Areas

- 1. Walks at tot lot along Mount Oak Road
- 2. Walks along Mount Oak Road from Aloha to 7-11
- 3. Sidewalks along Everest Drive (both sides of the road)
- 4. Walks along Excalibur at Town Center pond
- 5. Along Kenhill Drive at Route 197
- 6. Walks along 9th Street at Town Green

Public Works Snow Removal Equipment

- 6 Plow only pick-up trucks: 200, 213, 218, 250, 251, 252
- 4 Pick-ups with plow and small box spreader (< 1 ton/salt): 207, 217, 253, 254
- 2 Small dumps with plow and tailgate spreader (appx. 2 ton/salt): 205, 208
- 3 Mid-Size dumps with plow and tailgate spreader (appx. 4 ton/salt): 202, 209, 219
- 4 Large dumps with plow and tailgate spreader (appx. 8 ton/salt) : 204, 206, 308, 403
- 2 Tri-axle dumps with plow and tailgate spreader: 210, 211 (appx. 20 ton/salt)
- 2 Skid steer loaders (1 Gehl, 1 Bobcat)
- 2 Loader Backhoes (1 John Deere, 1 Caterpillar)
- 1 Rubber Tire Loader = 1 (Usually kept at yard loading salt trucks)
- 1 Utility division Backhoe that is used for snow if not busy with other activities



City of Bowie

2614 Kenhill Drive
Bowie, Maryland 20715

MEMORANDUM

To: David J. Deutsch, City Manager

From: R. James Henrikson, Public Works Director

Subject: Snow expenses

Date: February 22, 2010

As you know, we concluded our overtime snow removal operations related to the last two storms. Our total cost from the beginning on Friday, February 5th through last Friday February 19th is \$561,900. Following is the breakdown:

Overtime for City Personnel - \$134,408

Contractual snow removal - \$381,867

Salt, sand and deicers - \$45,625

As requested by the County, we have submitted these costs to them in order to determine if the statewide required threshold of 6.8 million dollars is met for FEMA reimbursement. We believe that threshold will be met. If the threshold is met and the snowfall is deemed to be of sufficient record depth, we hope to be able to be reimbursed for up to 75% of our expenses. However, the feds haven't yet determined the eligibility period. It is not likely that they will allow for all expenses over the entire two week time of our snow removal effort.

MAYOR G. Frederick Robinson MAYOR PRO TEM James L. Marcos

COUNCIL: Dennis Brady ♦ Diane M. Polangin ♦ Isaac C. Trough ♦ Todd M. Turner ♦ Geraldine Valentino-Smith CITY MANAGER David J. Deutsch
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