



## Providence Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

### **Staff Report: Sidewalk snow clearance** (For Action)

Presented at March 20, 2019 BPAC meeting

#### **Project Background**

The Commission will discuss snow clearance on sidewalks and potential options for improving consistency.

At the January 2015 BPAC public forum, one of the recommendations related to this topic:

*“The Commission heard numerous public comments on the need to better enforce ordinances requiring sidewalk shoveling in the City, We suggest that the City direct more of its enforcement and snow removal capacity to school zones and areas around the City's recreation centers and focus on outreach to businesses in regards to their obligation to clear snow from sidewalks in addition to parking lots. Additionally, the City should work with RIPTA and property owners to ensure that pedestrians have access to bus stops, perhaps by requiring property owners or the fire department to clear stops near their property or nearby fire hydrants, respectively. We also ask that the City consider ways to provide parking for residents in designated lots throughout the City during snow emergencies to allow for thorough plowing of the City's streets.”*

#### **Current policy**

Code of Ordinances Section 23-13:

“All **owners or persons having care** of any property” have **8 hours from the first daylight** following the end of any snowfall to clear a path **at least 3 feet wide** the entire sidewalk frontage of their property, including **curb ramps, corners, hydrants, and catch basins**, as well as applying salt or sand or comparable substance to any remaining snow or ice. The fine for failing to do so is **\$25-500 per day**, enforceable by the police department or DPW. Failure to pay can result in a lien on the property. In addition to this fine, DPW may remove the snow, for which the owner must reimburse the city.

Section 23-14: Snow removed from the sidewalk **cannot be put in the street after the street has been plowed**, subject to a \$25-500 fine enforceable by the police department or DPW.

#### **Additional challenges**

- Lack of systematic enforcement for Section 23-13
- Residents are unaware of the existing reporting mechanism of PVD311 (“Snow – Unshoveled Sidewalk”)
- Plows pushing compressed snow onto sidewalks & curb ramps



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- Assistance for seniors, people with disabilities, pregnant women, single parents, and people who work multiple jobs to support their families. Other barriers to clearing snow from sidewalks include illness or travelling for work or vacation
- Vacant & abandoned properties
- Differing snow qualities and schedules make a simple clearance policy challenging
- Changing who is responsible for sidewalk snow clearance requires changes to City workforce and capacity.
- Some of the heaviest pedestrian traffic is very close to sunrise in the winter, compressing snow before many homeowners can get out to shovel.

### Examples from other cities

A recent article on Streetsblog (<https://usa.streetsblog.org/2019/02/21/more-cities-are-taking-responsibility-for-clearing-sidewalks-of-snow/>) summarized policies in several cities viewed as models:

- **Rochester, NY** – the city hires contractors to plow all 878 miles of sidewalks whenever it snows 4 inches or more. To pay for it, a fee is added to property taxes based on the length of abutting sidewalk (averaging \$40/year).
- **Burlington, VT** – city parks staff clear sidewalks after clearing roads, prioritizing major pedestrian corridors, and completes the sidewalk clearing within 48 hours.
- **Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN** – homeowners are required to clear sidewalks, but if they do not and the city receives a complaint, the city will clear them and bill the property owner. The fine is \$150, and it takes about 3 days for the sidewalks to be cleared. The City estimates it would cost approximately \$1 million per snowfall to clear the sidewalks itself, which it is considering.
- **Syracuse, NY** – as of January 2019, the city plows 40 miles of high-priority sidewalk when it snows 3 inches or more. The city has a budget of \$170,000 for sidewalk snow clearance.
- **Duluth, MN** – the city struggles to meet its responsibility of clearing all sidewalks, and is seeking to narrow its responsibility to priority routes.

A group called Minnesota Walks has also published guidance on sidewalk snow clearance policy:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/physicalactivity/docs/cleaning.pdf>

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Respectfully submitted by Alex Ellis.