



Providence Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

Staff Report: Update on Snow Clearance on Sidewalks and Bike Lanes (For Action)

Presented at January 20, 2021 BPAC meeting

Project Background

The City of Providence seeks comments from the BPAC regarding snow removal procedures on sidewalks and bicycle lanes throughout the city.

The Providence Code of Ordinances Section 23-13 states: “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.

At the March 20, 2019 meeting of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission, two members of Public Works staff attended a thorough conversation with the Commission about challenges and opportunities to improve snow clearance on sidewalks. The staff report from this meeting is available at http://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/190320_StaffReport_SidewalkSnowRemoval.pdf.

That conversation identified the following challenges:

- The same City staff are responsible for plowing, shoveling city-owned sidewalks, inspecting road clearance, and inspecting sidewalks. Small inefficiencies in plowing operations can delay sidewalk work beyond the point when snow operations staff are required to rest, compounding the delay.
- RIDOT neither shovels sidewalks on state roads nor reimburses the City for the work despite a request to the State Senate 4-5 years ago.
- An inventory of sidewalks that are the City’s responsibility to clear did not exist as of 2019.
- The number of City personnel from other departments who respond to calls for volunteers to assist with snow operations does not meet the need for that assistance.
- Capacity to tow cars parked on-street during a parking ban is limited to 400 vehicles, resulting in numerous streets where plows are obstructed.
- Plows “banking” snow at street corners, obstructing the curb ramp, usually by inexperienced plow drivers.
- Residents with overnight on-street parking permits and no driveways do not have anywhere to put their cars during parking bans.



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- Some property owners clear the sidewalk in front of their property by plowing it to one side of the property, obstructing the pedestrian path.
- Bus shelters are often improperly cleared, creating a barrier to access the bus.
- 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

The commission recommended forming a working group to seek solutions to these challenges, and that City Council clarify language in the ordinance governing sidewalk snow clearance to preempt landlords from devolving the sidewalk snow clearance burden from to tenants.

Great Streets Plan Recommendation

“Increase Enforcement of Sidewalk Snow Removal: Due to existing capacity issues, additional funding is needed to dedicate staff members to inspection and enforcement of the City’s snow shoveling regulations.”

Staff Recommendations

- Highest-priority sidewalks for inspection should be identified
- A sidewalk snow clearance working group should be established before March 2021 to identify and implement process improvements by November 2021
- A public education component to sidewalk snow clearance should be planned in coordination with any increased enforcement

Respectfully submitted by Alex Ellis.