

Public Works Policy on Snow and Ice Removal

Date: January 2018

Purpose: To provide guidance to Town Departments, staff, residents, and visitors concerning snow and ice removal operations in the Town of Bridgewater.

Primary Responsible Department: Highway Department

Snow and Ice Removal Priorities:

- **First priority:** To ensure that police, fire and medical emergency equipment can move safely on Town streets.
- **Second priority:** To open main and secondary roads for use by the public.
- **Third priority:** To open residential streets. (Because of budget considerations, it may take additional time before some residential streets are opened.)
- **Fourth priority:** To clear sidewalks used to walk to schools around a 1 mile radius

General

The purpose of this policy/guide is to provide a general overview of the Town of Bridgewater, MA snow and ice program, establish procedures for our snow and ice management on public ways, review important bylaws, answer frequently asked questions, and most importantly, seek residents' support in providing safe streets and sidewalks during snow and ice emergencies. The intent of establishing such a policy/guide is to provide a uniform understanding of the priorities and procedures used to combat snow and ice related conditions and create reasonable expectations.

The responsibility for providing snow and ice management for the Town of Bridgewater's infrastructure, including over 130 miles of roadways and cul-de-sacs and 8 miles of sidewalks rest entirely with the Highway Department. The Department also provides snow and ice management to all municipal buildings including the Senior Center, Academy Building, Memorial Building, Library, Recreation Department, and the Highway Department. Snow and ice management is considered emergency work in that pavement must be cleared any time of the day or night. The Highway Department will salt during ice and wet snow storms and plow the snow off the roadways during the more significant storms. During a typical Bridgewater winter, 5,000 tons of salt are used to keep the roads safe for all drivers.

The Town's snow and ice management strategy has been carefully and professionally prepared to meet the needs of the community in a cost effective and reasonable manner. The resulting plan follows clearly identified routes when removing snow and ice from streets, sidewalks and Town parking areas. The Highway Department performs all of the salting and liquid de-icer operations in Town. For snowplowing and snow removal work, the Department also utilizes the services of private contractors to complement the Town's fleet of vehicles.

Snowplowing, Salting, and Chemical Treatment

The responsibility for ordering personnel and equipment into service for a winter maintenance operation rests primarily with the Highway Superintendent or his designee. The Police Department, during off hours, keeps watch and assists in notification to the Highway Superintendent or his designee of needed service.

Generally, Highway Department crews are on the roadways at the beginning of a storm event to spread a salt mix. When 2 to 3 inches of snow has accumulated on the roadways the Department may begin plowing operations. Assuming adequate equipment, the Highway Superintendent has identified 24 plow routes which are assigned a Town plow vehicle and/or a varying number of private plow contractors. When breakdowns occur, the Highway Superintendent may need to reassign plow equipment to other routes, and the time to clear roads may be extended.

The response time will depend on the forecasted moisture of the snow, timing of the storm, duration, freezing rain and blowing snow. Snow has different weight and compacting properties. A fluffy, dry snow requires less salt, sand and plowing than a heavy, wet snow. Wet snow may result in very slippery conditions especially when the newly fallen snow freezes on the pavement.

Bridgewater endorses a “bare pavement” policy to snow removal. This does not mean bare, dry pavement should be expected after each snowfall or ice storm. Furthermore, this does not mean that the streets will be free of ice and snow. It does mean that our snow and ice management techniques are geared toward reaching dry pavement. Expect major roads receiving priority treatment and substantial traffic volume to be cleared first. Secondary and neighborhood roads may take several days after a storm to clear.

The time of a storm can also determine when crews will begin their cleanup. Certain areas of the Town have a greater intensity of use and are therefore a priority for Department crews. Safety concerns, general welfare, and duration of travel also necessitate that priority be given to certain areas over others.

During high commuting times, crews will make every effort to keep the major roadways and school bus routes clear of snow and ice. Secondary and side streets will be cleared as soon as possible. Sidewalks are the last priority. Top priority will be given to the heavily traveled roads to ensure everyone's safety. Snow that falls on these roads often becomes packed by cars, making it more difficult to scrape off. During evening and early morning storms, Highway Department crews usually will have time to prepare the roads for the commuting hours. Typically, we will be complete with primary response 4 to 5 hours after most snow accumulation has stopped.

The duration of the storm also plays an important role in snowplowing and salting operations. Storms of extended duration tax all available resources (salt, chemicals, equipment, contractors and employees) to keep the roads open over an extended period of time. Four inches of snow that falls over a 24-hour period will require more salt, chemicals and man hours than six inches of snow that falls over an eight-hour period. Highway crews will be immediately dispatched with salt and chemicals when freezing rain falls. Motorists and pedestrians are advised to stay off the road ways until the pavement can be treated. This is also true for sidewalks.

Required Equipment, Staffing, and Oversight

The Town generally maintains at least 10 plow trucks and 8 salting trucks. These are supplemented by up to 75 privately contracted plow operators depending upon the severity of the snow or ice event. The entire Highway Department staff is mobilized for a storm event and scheduled by the Highway Superintendent to cover the duration of the storm.

Recognizing that 24 plow routes requires at least two, and usually four staff to oversee snow and ice removal operations, the Highway Superintendent designates specific staff to oversee Town and contracted crews.

Snowplowing Privately Owned Roads

By Massachusetts law the Highway Department is permitted to spend public funds only on publicly accepted streets. Privately owned roads must contract privately for snow removal. Only in the event that public safety vehicles cannot access a privately owned road may the Town plow on such privately owned road enough to allow passage of public safety vehicles.

Snowplowing for Town Hall, Police, Fire, Library, Senior Center, Memorial Building, and Parking Facilities

The Highway Department will plow and remove the snow from parking areas associated with the above facilities. Snow and ice management on walkways and entry ways also is done by the Highway Department for most of the public buildings. The Library and Bridgewater-Raynham School District use their own staff to clear walkways and entryways around their buildings.

Sidewalk Plowing

The Highway Department will plow sidewalks along central routes that are heavily traveled by children on their way to and from school. Central routes consist of a one mile radius around schools.

Sidewalk plowing will not begin until after the snow has stopped falling and plowing has ceased. If we have back to back storms, or extended storms, we may not clear sidewalks immediately after the storm. Sidewalk plowing and snow blowing impacts equipment, and often these pieces of equipment breakdown. In such events, we may not be able to clear sidewalks. **Regardless of whether the Town clears or not, it is still the residents' and business' responsibility to clear sidewalks. Highway crews do not sand and/or salt sidewalks.**

Your assistance is important in making sure snow is cleared from the sidewalk in front of your property. Residents and business owners share in the responsibility to provide safe passage in front of their properties. Be a good neighbor and help those that are not able.

Fire Hydrants/Catch Basins

During winter months, fire hydrants must be accessible and catch basins must be kept free and clear of snow and ice. This ensures the safety of your neighborhood in the event of an emergency. Keeping catch basins clear of snow and ice will reduce the possibility of street flooding during heavy rains or snow melting periods.

Your assistance is important in making sure snow is cleared from hydrants and catch basins. Please shovel the hydrant and catch basin nearest your house after each storm to ensure your property's protection.

Property Damage

The Town is not responsible for damage to property placed on Town property or within the rights-of-way for streets plowed by the Town. This includes but is not limited to mailboxes, lawns, sprinkler heads, fences, walls, steps, trees or shrubs that are located within the public way. The Town of Bridgewater generally owns 6 feet beyond the asphalt surface for accepted roads. Many plows used during snow operations are equipped with a 2± foot wing extension that extends beyond the cutting edge. This, combined the vast quantities of snow that come off the plow accounts for the majority of damage.

Mailbox Replacement Policy:

- The Town will only replace mailboxes if the Town's plow came in contact with a well-maintained mailbox or post.
- Other than mailboxes physically hit by plows, the Town ***is not*** responsible to repair, replace, or compensate for any such items placed in the public way.
- The Town will not replace mailboxes if the box is damaged by snow being discharged by the snowplow and if the plow does not come in contact with the mailbox or post.
- The Town will not replace plastic mailboxes. Plastic mailboxes may become very brittle in cold weather.
- The Town will not replace mailboxes that are in need of repair due to lack of maintenance or vandalism. The Town will not replace mailboxes that have rotten posts or spike/stick type supports.
- The Town will not replace mailboxes if the front of the box extends past the curb line and is not at least 6 inches from the curb line.
- Mailboxes to be repaired will be put on a list and repaired when the Highway Department is back on regular schedule and all weather-related priorities are completed.
- Mailboxes and posts damaged directly by a snowplow will be fixed and/or replaced by the Town with a standard wooden post and black box. The Town will provide a check in the amount of \$50.00 for homeowner's use for any specialty mailbox and/or post that cannot be repaired.

All plow damage must be reported to the Highway Department by April 1st of the current snow and ice season, preferably with an electronic picture of the damage, in order to facilitate a claim. The Highway Superintendent or Highway Foreman will inspect all damage claims before any determination is made. Damage reported after April 1st will not be considered for repairs or reimbursement by the Town of Bridgewater.

Residents are urged to place stakes with reflectors along the edge of lawns and the corner of driveways / walkways. This helps the drivers know where the edge of pavement is during severe storms.

Departure from Policy

The Town recognizes that the conditions maybe so unusual or unexpected that a departure from these general policies should be authorized. Therefore, when conditions warrant, the Town Manager in consultation with the Highway Superintendent or his/her designee may order a departure from these general rules when in the opinion of the Town Manager conditions requires such action

Questions and Complaints Received Most Often by the Highway Department

Q. Can I push snow from my property onto the sidewalk or street?

A. NO. A Town ordinance prohibits this act. Additionally, such action may bring liability if an accident should occur. This also increases the Town's costs for snow operations.

Q. Do some streets receive priority during a snow storm?

A. YES. Major roadways, school bus routes, and hills are a top priority.

Q. Does the Town really need a parking ban?

A. YES. Snowplowing and removal are difficult. Parked cars on the roadways not only increase the number of hazards, but also the time it takes to remove the snow. With limited equipment and personnel, and an abundance of cul-de-sacs which are very difficult to plow, time is precious to plow crews.

Q. Do sidewalks receive the same priority as streets?

A. NO. The roads are always plowed first. Only certain sidewalks are plowed when the storm has ended.

Q. Why is snow pushed into my driveway?

A. The situation is unavoidable. The plows remove the snow from curb to curb for maximum clearance of the roadway. This provides for maximum drainage and public safety.

Q. Why does the Town sometimes return to plow streets days after a storm when the pavement is already bare?

A. After a large snowfall, once the roads are clear and our crews are rested, we return to “push back” the snow banks. This does two things. First, it gives us a place to put snow in case of another major snowfall so that roads can remain open and safe. Second, it opens up catch basins to allow melting snow or rainfall to move off the roadway to prevent freezing or flooding.

Q. Who determines the opening, closing or delayed opening of school during snow and ice storms?

A. The Bridgewater-Raynham Regional School Superintendent. The Highway Superintendent, Police and Fire Chiefs are generally in communication with the School Superintendent regarding school closures.

****Town Bylaws and Ordinances**

Article X, Streets and Sidewalks:

Section 11

Whenever for the purpose of removing or plowing snow or removing ice from any way, it becomes necessary to remove or cause to be removed, to some convenient place, including in such term a public garage, any vehicle interfering with such work, the superintendent of streets, or other officer having charge of ways, or duly authorized police officer, is hereby authorized to remove, or cause to be removed, the said vehicle and liability for the cost of such removal, and of the storage charges, if any resulting there from, shall be imposed upon the owner of such vehicle. The Town is not responsible for damage incurred to mail boxes, fences, trees, shrubs and/or other obstruction located within the Town layout, resulting from snow removal.

Section 12

No person shall pump water or other liquids onto any sidewalk, street or public way during the months of November to April so as to create a dangerous condition or Town property damage, unless the Town Council grants a permit for an emergency.

Section 13

No person shall remove snow or ice from any private property or from Town property including sidewalks, driveways or driveway aprons and place said snow or ice so as to block a sidewalk or a Town way or create a dangerous condition.