

Winter Weather Update - Challenges and Solutions

February 26, 2015

The severe winter of 2015 has presented many challenges to each of us as individuals, and to the Town as well. It seems proper, at this time, to review some winter-related issues, the challenges which the Town has faced, and the solutions which have been implemented in the short-term, as well as those which are intended in the long-term.

Weathering any winter is a balancing act, this one more than most due to the severity of the season. The Town must balance issues of Public Safety, Budgetary responsibility, and Optimization of Personnel and Material Resources. Below is a list of the challenges which have arisen and the solutions which have been implemented regarding each issue.

A. Severity of Winter:

Challenge(s)

- This is the snowiest February ever. More snow has fallen this February than in any other February since records began to be kept over 100 years ago.
- This is the second COLDEST winter on record.

Solution(s)

- DPW has been following the protocols of other Towns the State and predecessors with regard to the appropriate time to begin plowing roads after onset of storm.
- Council President, Vice-President, and DPW Director met on Wednesday 2/18 to discuss the preferred time to begin plowing after the beginning of a storm. Earlier starts have budgetary implications but that is what has been opted for.
- Council President conferred with Fire Chiefs regarding the needs of emergency responders and vehicles, and prioritization of road clearing.
- Council President consulted with RI EMA about the possibility that the Town would require assistance in personnel and equipment due to various issues addressed below. A process was put in place to access these resources if needed through the EOC website.
- Police Chief and Sharon Cotter (Asst. EMA Director) set up access to the EOC website at Police station so that it is available on a 24/7 basis.
- Police station has been asked to collect names and phone numbers of all those who call in with snow related issues so that the Town can follow up individually.

B. Personnel:

DPW has five (5) laborers, one (1) mechanic, and one (1) director for a total of seven (7) permanent full-time staff members. Additionally there are three (3) part-time plow drivers.

During the past month, the DPW has suffered staffing issues due to leaves of absence, and part-timers taking new jobs. Details can be found below.

The best case scenario throughout the month of February 2015 was that the Town had only five plow drivers to cover six plow routes. This was provided that everyone on staff was able and willing to work the overtime that has been needed.

Mechanic position

Challenge(s)

- DPW Mechanic was on leave (from 1/22 through 2/23/2015).

Solution(s)

- Council President contacted Laborer's Union for a fill-in mechanic, none were available.
- Advertised on Town website / word of mouth. This yielded only one applicant who wanted \$75/ hour.
- DPW Director and the laborers have been doing basic repairs to vehicles (this however results in fewer plow drivers on the road).
- More complicated repair work has been sent out for completion.
- Mechanic has returned to work as of Tuesday, 2/24 so this issue has resolved.

Laborer / part-time Driver positions

Challenge(s)

- One full-time laborer is currently out on leave (from 1/29 to present).
- Remaining full-time employees are burning out working weekend shifts and long shifts. They need time to rest and tend to their own properties.
- Two of our part-time drivers have obtained alternate employment elsewhere and are no longer available to us.

Solution(s)

- DPW Director proposed and Council approved a raise in the rate of pay for part-time snow plow drivers.
- Council President contacted Laborer's Union for part-time drivers – none were available as they have been utilized to shovel off the roofs of State buildings.
- Advertised on Town website / word of mouth for part-time drivers.
- Two applications have been received and are being processed.

C. Equipment:

Challenge(s)

- The Town has an old and deteriorating fleet.
- Heavy snow means heavy workload, numerous breakdowns, and numerous repairs required.

Solution(s)

- Some repairs done in-house (as noted above).
- Some repairs outsourced (as noted above).
- DPW Director expedited delivery of two new smaller plow vehicles and put them on road.
- Police Chief sought and received approval to use the two LESO trucks to assist in clearing Town roads.
- Treasurer has expedited the implementation of insurance coverage and provision of funds to register these vehicles and get them on the road as soon as possible. She has been available to do this on weekends and on her regular days off.
- Additional truck has been requested in capital budget.
- Need for wing plow has been identified and request for funding will be included in this year's budget process.

D. Materials and Other Concerns:

Use of sand, salt, gasoline, and diesel fuel is still within budgetary constraints.

Sand and Salt:	74%	of budget expended.
Fuel and Lube:	53%	“ “
Parts and Repairs:	85%	“ “
Heating oil:	31%	“ “

Some difficulty has been had obtaining road salt due to continuous storms here in the northeast and a couple of storms in the south. So far, the Town has been able to obtain the needed salt to meet the needs of the Town.

Cost of parts and repairs have been higher than normally expected due to extra wear and tear on the aging fleet and the need to outsource some repairs.

The expectation is that gravel line item may go significantly over budget this year to address potholes and mud associated with the spring thaw.

Prior to the onset of winter, DOT was contacted to ensure the weight limit of the Hemlock Brook Bridge located on Foster Center Road could bear the weight of snow removal equipment. This bridge was cleared for all traffic by RIDOT.

DPW Director has been in regular contact with RI DOT concerning widening of intersections and other issues on State roads.

E. Budgetary Concerns:

Overall, the snow plow budget is in good shape.

YTD expended on Snow plow overtime:	\$17,966
Budgeted snow plow overtime:	\$23,000
% expended:	78%

Reimbursement is being sought from RIEMA/FEMA for expenses associated with the State of Emergency declared by the Governor earlier this year due to the blizzard.

F. Summary:

Overall, we appear to have weathered the winter in a reasonable fashion (so far).

Further equipment updates are required and need to be budgeted for and acquired as soon as possible.

DPW Director has created an inventory of roads which could use general widening come spring.

Updates to DPW personnel are required to include either;

- Increasing permanent staff in Department of Public Works.
- Implementing mandatory overtime in the case of weather related events.
- Outsourcing all snow plowing on Town Roads.