

From Gardner Mayor Michael J. Nicholson

Good Morning Madam President and Councilors,

I am writing to provide you with an update on the operations that took place with regard to the storm yesterday and planning moving forward for the rest of the week.

As of the time this email is being written, there are currently 237 residences without power in Gardner across 19 neighborhoods. At the height of the storm, we were around 430. National Grid is currently out to address these issues. The largest area it is the heritage park area in Ward 5. Due to the large number of areas without power across the Commonwealth, National Grid has assigned a generic timeframe of tomorrow at 6pm for all areas in the City to be restored by, but different pockets without power will see power restored throughout the day before that timeline.

DPW Salting crews were first dispatched in the City at 8:00pm on Monday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, where they began pre-treating the roads by salting them only as there was mostly just rain at this time. The City currently has seven salt trucks that cover the full City. This is because only the larger dump truck style trucks are able to perform this operation. The remaining staff prepared the other pickup truck plow vehicles for use. At 1am on Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, the DPW Foremen determined that the snow was at a plowable depth and called in the remaining members of the department to begin plowing operations. Crews were out on the road plowing from that moment until 10:30am this morning. We have now shifted back to salt operations to try to get rid of the “hard pack” ice that formed due to the weight of the snow and the vehicle traffic over the snow on several streets across the City. Crews will be dismissed at noon today after working 40 hours straight with just coffee/brief rest breaks in between.

Unlike with the private sector, where crews are required to take time off after a certain number of hours, public sector plowing operators are different depending on their union contracts. In Gardner, our plow drivers earn eight (8) hours of time that accrues and builds up for later use for every fourteen (14) consecutive hours of overtime worked. This is to ensure that the streets remain passable throughout the entire storm

without having to have the entire department off shift while snow accumulates during the storm.

During snow plowing operations, the City has 35 pieces of equipment that go out to the City's 25 plow routes. Each route is approximately 30 miles long. Our Crews did each route twelve (12) times as of the writing of this email for both salting and plowing operations since Monday at 8pm. This means that on average each individual driver has driven approximately 360 miles in the City (the equivalent of driving from Gardner City Hall to the Washington Monument) since the storm began, or 12,600 miles total (the distance between Gardner, MA and Kingsford, Australia) all within the last 40 hours.

We then have four contractors who, between the four of them, plow the municipal parking lots and the sidewalks in front of City Hall, the Post Office, and the Senior Center. (Please note that the City owns the front lawn of the Post Office, and the Federal Government only owns from the front steps of the building and behind the building, leaving us responsible for the walks in front). The School Department takes care of their own plowing and snow removal contractor operations.

During the period in which crews were out plowing, there were 158 calls received by the City's 9-1-1 Dispatch Center. These calls were largely related to downed trees, wires, power outages, frustration with snow removal, three instances of residents throwing shovels at DPW plow drivers as they drove by, and one instance of a resident stopping a DPW driver from plowing and demanding to see his driver's license.

There were about 16 instances of trees that fell across the road that needed to be removed. For the most part the plows and front-end loaders were able to push these to the sides of the roads to clear the roads for traffic and crews will come back and pick them up at a later date.

Since crews have already been working for 40 hours without stop, in speaking with Director Arnold, we will try to get some to come back on voluntary overtime shifts tonight to begin to plow some sidewalks, however, we simply aren't sure how many will come back to take those shifts voluntarily after already working a week's worth of time. As such, some sidewalks will likely not be able to be plowed until Thursday or Friday of

this week. We also will likely not be able to remove the snow bankings from the sidewalks in the Downtown and South Gardner business districts until early next week, to prioritize getting as many sidewalks open around the schools as soon as possible and then making the remaining sidewalks across the City passable.

In speaking with Director Arnold and City Engineer Rob Oliva, the City really hasn't seen snowfalls like this since the early 2000s. While we've had larger storms in terms of overall impacts – like the 2009 Ice Storm – in terms of snow fall amount and amount of time needed for plowing, this ranks in the top 3. Official reports have Gardner at around 28-30 inches of snow.

EL Harvey was able to pick up Tuesday's trash/recycle collection until 12pm, when they had to end operations due to snow conditions. They are out today to pick up everything that was missed yesterday and do today's route.

As stated in the email I sent on Monday regarding the parking ban, this is one of the few times we had a day-time parking ban aside from just overnight. This message was sent out over the City's CodeRED system, published on the City's website and social media platforms, broadcasted on GETV, displayed on the City's electronic message board at the Uptown Rotary, and – since the day time ban impacted the business community – Gardner Square Two and the Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce also broadcasted the message to their memberships through their Constant Contact listserv. The message was also sent to all local media outlets. During the period in which the ban was in effect, the Police Department issued 15 tickets, and 10 vehicles were towed.

Speaking of the parking ban, when the On-Street Parking Ban ordinance was amended by the City Council in 2018, only the on-street portion of the ordinance was amended, and not the sections of the ordinance relating to parking in the City parking lots. What this does is create an issue in which an on-street parking ban is in place at the same time when parking is not allowed in municipal parking lots. The Administration is currently preparing an ordinance proposal to address this issue to be submitted to the City Council at a later date. This section of the City Code was not enforced this storm, but I believe should be addressed rather than simply be ignored while technically legally required.

In terms of budget – I believe this storm will get us at a high approximation of \$820,000 in snow & ice expenses for the season. (this is just an approximation and not an actual number. We'll have better actuals by the week's end) Between what was budgeted for in the operating budget and what I had set aside in free cash, the Administration had a seasonal budget of \$900,000, so we are still under that number for now.

Please let me know if you have any questions relating to the above.

Best,

Mike Nicholson

**Michael J. Nicholson**

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