

**CITY OF BUFFALO**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, PARKS & STREETS**  
**REVISED 2008-09 SNOW PLAN**

**Executive Summary**

**Impact of the Storms**

On the weekend of December 19, 2008 a combination of two storms hit the City of Buffalo first on Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup> and then again on Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup>.

Both storms produced record snowfalls for each day: 10.4" on Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup> and 11" on Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup>. In addition, during the course of the Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup> storm, the city also experienced sustained winds in excess of 35 mph, with gusts early in the day hitting approximately 70 mph and continuing through the day any where between 35 and 50 mph, which contributed to widespread blizzard conditions in the city and region.

This made travel conditions on all City streets very hazardous and warranted Mayor Brown issuing travel advisories for the City of Buffalo for the weekend.

During this extended period of time, it was very difficult to keep the main streets and secondary streets passable for emergency vehicles. In the effort of getting our crews into residential streets, we were continually hammered on Sunday with extremely high winds and near 0 visibility. When work began in the residential streets Monday morning, we experienced major difficulties with illegally parked cars and cars, which became stuck in snow drift areas. With the assistance from Parking Enforcement and residents of the City of Buffalo, we were able to get through this task with a cooperative effort.

Two areas of the City logged the most complaints: the Westside of Buffalo (in the Niagara District and parts of the North and Delaware Districts); and the neighborhood around the University at Buffalo South Campus. Both areas are older sections of the City with extremely narrow streets and two-sided weekend parking Type II.

## **Mayor Brown's Response**

On Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup> Mayor Brown ordered the Mayor's Call and Resolution Center opened, so city residents could contact city representatives and express their concern about plowing efforts and other storm-related issues. The Call and Resolution Center, now operating with a convenient 311 call-in number, was open Sunday evening from 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm. During that time, 1,901 calls were taken, most of which were regarding snow plowing.

On Monday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Call and Resolution Center stayed open past its normal hours of operation (8:30 am – 4:30 am) until 11:00 pm. Mayor Brown joined Call Center personnel in speaking with city residents who were calling in to express their concerns about the overall snow removal effort. The Center processed 5,920 calls through the course of Monday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, which established a record daily number of calls processed since the inception of the Call Center.

Call and Resolution Center data highlighted that many residents were frustrated over the lack of neighborhood residential streets being plowed in a timely manner or at all.

According to Call and Resolution Center personnel, the greatest volume of complaints came from the following city neighborhoods:

- A. Black Rock/ Riverside Area
- B. Lower West side Area
- C. Hertel/ Parkside Area
- D. University Area ( Northeast section)
- E. Fruit Belt Area
- F. Cold Spring Area

As a result of the widespread city resident complaints logged through the Call and resolution Center, as well as other outlets, Mayor Brown on December 24<sup>th</sup> called for a comprehensive review of the snow removal effort following both late December storms and convened meetings on December 30<sup>th</sup> and January 2, 2009 with key city personnel responsible for managing the city's snow removal operations.

On December 24<sup>th</sup> Mayor Brown stated:

“As we did immediately following the 2006 October Surprise storm, my Administration will conduct a thorough review of the recent snow fighting efforts in the city following the two record snow storms. I have not been happy with the overall post-storm clean-up effort, particularly in our residential neighborhood side streets. We will examine every aspect of our snow fighting capabilities and review the strategies that were employed during and immediately following these record-setting snowstorms. From clearing our main streets and emergency routes to the city’s side streets and sidewalks, I want to speak directly with the supervisors and personnel who fought around the clock to keep the city functioning during what were very trying circumstances. I know that city residents were frustrated about side streets and sidewalks not being cleared in a timely manner and I want to look at every opportunity we have to correct whatever problems that might have occurred during the storm and post-storm clean-up efforts.”

### **Revised Snow Removal Plan Highlights**

As a result of Mayor Brown’s mandated review of the City of Buffalo’s snow removal operations, the following revisions have been made to the original Department of Works, Parks and Streets 2008-09 Snow Removal Standard Operating Procedure Manual and the Department’s snow removal operations:

#### **Implement GPS Pilot Program**

After discussions during a CitiStat meeting earlier in 2008, the Department of Works, Parks and Streets was directed to collaborate with the Department Management Information Systems to develop a Global Positioning System (GPS) pilot project for snow removal vehicles.

Prior to the December 2008 snowstorms the Department of Works, Parks and Streets had collaborated with the Department Management Information Systems to undertake a 30-day Global Positioning System (GPS) pilot project for the Department of Works, Parks and Streets’ fleet of snow removal equipment.

Telogis Inc., an industry leader in GPS and has done several implementations in other cities of similar size and climate, is coordinating the city’s GPS pilot project.

This new GPS system will allow Public Works to gather real time data on the location, speed and idle time of the vehicles. Exception rules will be programmed and alerts will be sent to the appropriate parties whenever a truck exits its designated area, exceeds the posted speed limit or idles too long. Other advanced features include, the ability to monitor telemetry events (i.e. know if the plow on the vehicle is engaged), ability to push turn-by-turn voice prompted direction to the drivers, and the ability to identify the closest vehicle to any location, providing for fast response to problem areas.

The system will also be able to track vehicle maintenance, and equipment crews will receive automated alerts when service is due, which could drastically reduce vehicle downtime. There will also be a full integration with the CRM software used Division of Citizen Services, allowing agents to give accurate and up to date information during snow events. The software is also completely web-based and can be viewed from any location by any authorized party.

GPS devices will be installed on seven snow removal vehicles operating in the same area of the city. Over the 30-day period we will evaluate the effect of the system on our snow removal efforts. We will be monitoring several areas for quantifiable improvements, most notably the amount of lane miles plowed.

### Adjust Alternate Parking Regulations

Change all “Type I” streets from No Parking 4:00 pm Sunday - 4:00 pm Wednesday changeover to “Type 2K” regulation No Parking 6:00 pm Mon – 6:00 pm Thursday.

This change was actually started in the early part of the decade and was completed in the Delaware District and partially done in the South District.

The benefits of this change include shifting the “changeover day” away from Sundays when people may be entertaining guests or coming back from vacations or weekend trips too late to move their cars and changing the hour to 6:00 pm more closely coincides with the time when people arrive home from work on Monday. Further, the timing of the 6 to 6 changeover is more accommodating to snow removal crew shift schedules.

### Utilize personnel in other departments for snow removal

In the past, and including the snow removal activity following the December snowstorms, personnel from other departments (e.g., Buffalo Sewer Authority; Water Department) were considered for potential deployment to reinforce the DPW personnel in the field.

Going forward this will no longer be a “potential” manpower reinforcement option, but an identified and prepared manpower reinforcement resource for the snow removal operations during severe weather conditions.

### Retain private contractors for snow removal

The Department maintains an emergency service contract with a private snow plowing contractor during the city’s winter season. The Commissioner will establish additional emergency private contractor plowing contracts to ensure greater coverage of critical city locations during and following winter storm events similar to the December 2008 snowstorms.

The Department did examine private snow contractor operations in Rochester, NY and learned that while the City of Rochester deployed private snow contractors to the city's residential neighborhoods if snowfalls exceed 3", the City of Rochester assesses all city property owners (residential and commercial) an annual fee of \$1.18 for street maintenance and \$2.27 for roadway plowing per lineal foot of each property's street frontage.

This "user fee" is not deemed desirable for property owners in the City of Buffalo.

#### Secure towing companies to remove illegally parked cars

Based on the experience of Public Works and Parking Violations personnel during the December 2008 snowstorms where private towing contractors would not participate in the removal of illegally parked cars due to perceived low contractor fees for service, it is the recommendation of the Department of Parking Enforcement and the Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets to make the following changes to the city's parking enforcement operations during snowstorm events like the December 2008 snowstorms:

- Raise rates for private mini-tows from \$27.00 to \$50.00 per private contractor per vehicle towed. Ticket fee for vehicle owner of a mini-tow will remain at \$40.00. (A mini-tow involves relocating a parked vehicle illegally parked and obstructing plowing operations to a designated legal parking area close to the location of car's original location).
- Raise rates for private full-tows from \$50.00 to \$75.00 per private contractor per vehicle towed. Ticket fee for vehicle owner of a full-tow will remain at \$90.00. (A full-tow would involve a vehicle removed from an illegally parked location and transported to the City of Buffalo's vehicle impound).
- Stronger contract language with penalties will be established in contracts with private towing companies who fail to report for service during emergencies.
- The Departments' propose that between November and April, all automobiles must be moved within 48 hours. It is currently 72 hours.
- During storm emergencies, a Parking Violations Bureau officer will be assigned to each of the city's five plowing districts to constantly monitor parking conditions and their impact on plowing operations.

#### Improve residential plowing strategies

The city's long-held and traditional snow removal strategy has been permanently altered. In the past, and maintained during the initial phases of the December 2008 snowstorms, the city's plow crews adhered to the standard operating procedure of plowing the city's main streets, emergency routes and secondary routes, leaving the city's residential side streets for last.

Due to the high volume of snow during both the Friday and Sunday snowstorms, this created very difficult circumstances for city residents, particularly on the city's West Side into Black Rock and Riverside.

From now on, city high lift and V-Plows will be deployed at the beginning of snow emergency events to residential neighborhoods deemed the most vulnerable. This will be determined based on historical information (including recent 311 Call and Resolution Center logged information) that was mapped for Public Works, as well as through the Department's GPS Pilot program that will be concentrated in vehicles assigned to the aforementioned residential neighborhoods on the city's West Side into Black Rock and Riverside.

#### Enhance training for new and current employees

New training protocols have been established including the development of training films and extended in-field driving instructions to better educate personnel in plowing procedures for personnel from Streets and Sanitation, as well as other departments so they may more effectively in the snow removal process.

#### Create Snow Fighting Command Center

To properly manage the city's new GPS system for the Department's plow vehicles, a Snow Fighting Command Center has been permanently established on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of City Hall adjacent to the Commissioner office.

This will provide better communication between work being done on the roads and ensure up-to-the-minute communication between the personnel in the field, tracking precisely where vehicles are located and determine if resources need to be redeployed based on evolving weather and roadway conditions.

The new Command Center will include: three monitors that will be used to review GPS units, live radar and citywide surveillance cameras throughout the City of Buffalo.

#### Establish mandatory post-storm reports

It is now mandated by the Commissioner of the Department of Public Works Parks & Streets that a routine post-storm report must be filed within 48-hours of all snow removal operations. This will enable Department personnel to properly judge the crews performance by plowing districts and determine if any disciplinary action is necessary based on breakdowns in job performance and/or execution of professional responsibilities.

## Implement Corporate Emergency Access System

Earlier in the decade, a City of Buffalo pilot project of the Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS) examined the value implementing this corporate access program, which enables essential employees of any given business to gain access to their respective business during an emergency (e.g., a Mayor-imposed citywide driving ban during a snowstorm). While well received by local participating businesses, the program was never implemented on a permanent basis.

As a result of Mayor Brown's participation in the ReadyCommunities Partnership, a project of the Community Institute for Preparedness, Response and Recovery and the Corporate Crisis Response Officers Association, the Mayor has decided that activating the CEAS for Buffalo will benefit city-based business during a potential crisis or emergency.

ReadyCommunities Partnership is a public/private collaboration by leaders from all sectors to identify and demonstrate how innovation, technology and best practices can help identify and fortify local critical infrastructure, and leverage local private and community sector assets to augment public sector response capability during the first 72 hours of a national or large-scale crisis.

The work Mayor Brown has conducted with the ReadyCommunities Partnership convinced him that the CEAS was an important tool for the City of Buffalo's overall crisis management system.

CEAS was developed collaboratively by the New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO), the Business Network of Emergency Resources Inc. (BNET), local businesses and community leaders across New York State.

Any city-based business wishing to participate in the CEAS program apply to BNET for official identification credentials, which are recognized by the City of Buffalo Police Department and other first-response agencies for access to restricted areas based on an emergency situation. Based on the nature of a declared emergency, five entry levels can be established by first responders. Details of these entry levels and the broader CEAS program are available through the Buffalo Police department.