

City of Spokane Snow Plan Overhaul FAQs

When it snows, we respond.

Rev. 10/2017



Background: Following a winter with heavy snowfall and concerns about how the conditions were addressed, the City of Spokane has revamped its Snow Response Plan. Using information gathered last winter and from a survey that 1,600 citizens filled out, the City has developed a new approach that departs from previous plans.

Citizens and businesses will see:

- More plowing, sooner.
- More equipment and people available for snow removal.
- Completion of the full-City plow during heavier snowfalls more quickly – in about 3 days.
- Piloting of new equipment to minimize driveway berms.
- Greater emphasis on plowing snow away from sidewalks.

The City is rolling out a revised approach to snow removal the 2017-18 snow season. Citizens will be encouraged to offer comments and suggestions throughout the winter so the plan can be revised for future winters.

The approach will require the City and citizens to work together.

- The City is committing to greater plowing efforts and different techniques to help minimize impacts to parking areas, driveways and sidewalks. And, it is committing to maintaining sidewalks adjacent to City-owned property.
- Citizens and business owners will need to follow parking restrictions and commit to keeping their sidewalks clear and assisting neighbors who need help.

Below, please find a series of frequently asked questions to get you all the details about the proposed changes to our snow removal plans.

When is the “Snow Season?”

The snow season remains the same, running from Nov. 15 to March 15. Spokane sees most of its snowfall during these four months of the year, with snow often concentrated in December and January. During Snow Season, the City monitors weather conditions 24 hours a day. Crews proceed with regular winter operations until it snows and plowing operations are triggered.

What is the plan for plowing when it snows?

When it snows, even if it's just an inch or two, crews will plow all the streets, including residential streets. To hold down costs, crews will complete this work primarily during regular day shifts Monday through Friday. Crews from the City's water and wastewater utilities will supplement Street crews for plowing efforts sooner, and more equipment will be available on a regular basis for plowing.

Arterials are plowed first, followed by hills in residential areas. Identified vehicle routes around schools also have been prioritized for clearing.

What happens when it snows a lot?

During a larger snowfall of four inches or more, crews will move to 24/7 operations to complete a full-City plow. The Street Department also will call in private contractors to assist with plowing efforts. With more personnel available from other departments, private contractors and more equipment, crews expect to be able to complete that plow in three days, down from four.

What's the Snow Corridor Plan?

When crews cannot effectively keep arterials clear because of weather conditions, they will use the existing Snow Corridor Plan. Crews will concentrate on identified routes that citizens can rely on until conditions improve. The routes are signed. The routes include:

North-south

- Maple/Ash. I-90 to the north City limits.
- Cedar/High Drive/Hatch. I-90 to 57th Avenue.
- Division Street. I-90 to the north City limits
- Bernard/Grand. Third Avenue to High Drive.
- Freya/Greene/Market. I-90 to the north City limits.
- Freya/Thor/Ray/Regal. I-90 to 57th Avenue.

East-west

- Francis Avenue. West City limits on Nine Mile Road to Havana Street.
- Wellesley Avenue. Assembly Street to Freya Street.
- Sunset Highway/Second and Third Avenues. West City limits to east City limits.
- 29th Avenue. Cedar Street to Havana Street.
- 37th Avenue. Bernard Street to the east City limits.

What about driveway berms?

The Street Department will outfit seven pieces of equipment, including four new front-end loaders and three graders, with “gates” that allow plow drivers to avoid placing snow across a driveway or alley access. This is a pilot program and use of the gates will be spread out across the City so different property owners will benefit during different plowing efforts. The City will buy more gates next year if the program is successful.

Changed plowing techniques also will help alleviate berms and snow pushed onto sidewalks. Crews will plow away from the curb somewhat to help keep snow away from driveway and sidewalks. Snow also may be pushed to center medians in some cases.

And here’s a tip—Shovel to the right of your driveway when you’re looking at the street. That prevents plows from pushing snow you shoveled back into the driveway.

What do crews do when plowing isn’t needed?

During the snow season, the City changes its street operations to accommodate the ice and snow of Inland Northwest winters. Street crews switch to 10-hour shifts, covering 20-hours a day, 7 days a week. Weather is monitored continuously for changing conditions. Crews spread de-icer, clean up problem areas, and perform related tasks to improve driving conditions and keep citizens safe.

What are the parking restrictions?

Citizens are asked to park on the odd side of the street in residential areas for the **entire snow season**, which runs from Nov. 15 to March 15. The goal is to make it easier for citizens to comply with parking rules and aid plow drivers with their work.

Downtown on snowy days, on-street parking will be prohibited between midnight at 6 a.m. so parking bays can be plowed out. New signs will be installed in the downtown, indicating this rule within the boundaries of Maple to Division and I-90 to the Spokane River. The City has some parking options for snow days under the freeway, particularly for those with residential parking passes in the core, and there are also numerous off-street surface parking lots.

Why do we need to restrict parking?

Restricting parking during snow emergencies allows plow drivers to clear away more snow, widening the area available for cars, trucks and buses and generally improving drivability for motorists. In the downtown, parking restrictions also allow the City to clear snow from parking spaces, allowing for easier parking for customers. In residential areas, limiting parking to one side of the street allows plow drivers to move away from the curb, reducing the amount of snow and ice that ends up on sidewalks.

What happens in neighborhoods with little off-street parking?

The City has reached out to Neighborhood Councils and has asked them to work to identify locations with parking lots that would be willing to provide parking until plows work through the residential areas.

What about recreational vehicles parked on City streets?

In advance of the snow season, citizens must move all recreational vehicles, boats, and trailers off the street to winter storage locations. These vehicles will be towed if they aren't moved by Nov. 15. Basketball hoops are another obstacle that should be moved from the right of way.

What happens in Browne's Addition?

Unlike in previous years, Browne's Addition will be treated like any other neighborhood. Citizens are asked to park on the odd side of the street for the entire snow season. Rather than setting special parking restrictions for Browne's Addition, the City will use smaller equipment in the area to complete plowing activities.

What happens in Downtown?

In downtown on snowy days, on-street parking will be prohibited between midnight at 6 a.m. so parking bays can be plowed out. New signs will be installed in the downtown, indicating this rule within the boundaries of Maple to Division and I-90 to the Spokane River. The City has some parking options for snow days under the freeway, particularly for those with residential parking passes in the core.

Snow will be plowed to the middle of street in downtown Spokane, but City crews plan to pick up those middle berms as they are being created.

What about sidewalks?

Citizens and businesses must keep their sidewalks shoveled. The City is asking citizens to clear a 36-inch path to allow pedestrians to travel effectively, with a goal of completion by 9 a.m. after a snowfall. Citizens also are asked to clear a pedestrian path even if no sidewalk exists. It's about being a good neighbor. By City ordinance, adjacent property owners are responsible for keeping the sidewalks clear and safe, and liability issues rest with the adjacent property owner, not the City. Seniors or disabled individuals who can't maintain their own sidewalks can call 3-1-1 to get information on volunteer services.

Why is it important to keep sidewalks clear?

Sidewalks are an important mode of travel for many of Spokane's citizens. Our children use them to get to school and to their bus stops. Many people use them to reach Spokane Transit Authority stops and to get basic supplies at grocery stores and other locations. Icy and snow-packed sidewalks are dangerous and often leave people to walk to their destinations in the street.

What is the City doing to help keep snow off of sidewalks?

Changed plowing techniques will help alleviate snow pushed onto sidewalks. Crews will plow away from the curb somewhat to help keep snow away from driveway and sidewalks. Snow also may be pushed to center medians in some cases. The City also is committing to maintaining the sidewalks adjacent to its properties to improve pedestrian passage.

How is the City going to help schools?

The City has worked with area schools to identify important pedestrian and vehicle routes. Plow crews will prioritize those vehicle routes around schools and get to them quickly, after main arterials and hills in residential areas.

Additionally, pedestrian routes leading to areas with school crossing guards have been identified. The City will notify property owners along these routes of the importance of keeping them clear for school children.

How is the City prioritizing school routes for walking and buses, STA stops and routes, and medical facilities?

Increased plowing in residential areas at lower snow totals should help keep vehicle routes more clear for all of these locations. The City also will coordinate with our partners at Spokane Public Schools, Spokane Transit Authority, and our medical facilities to address areas of concern.

The City will work to educate and encourage citizens and businesses to complete sidewalk clearing. The City will provide more intense education efforts on routes that serve school children and have been jointly identified by the City and Spokane Public Schools. In the future, the City could look at additional enforcement of sidewalk snow removal on these routes.

How is the City going to communicate with citizens?

The City will provide information before and during the snow season, sharing information with the local media and through a variety of communication tools from social media to CityCable 5 to the City's web site. Staff will update online plowing maps at www.spokanecity.org more frequently during 24/7 operations to give citizens better information. Plow routes in residential neighborhoods are being modified and renamed, closely following the City's neighborhood boundaries to make it easier for people to understand where plows are.

A Snow Hotline with recorded messages about plow progress is available at 509.625.7737, and citizens can call 3-1-1 to report a snow concern. For information, go to My.SpokaneCity.org/Streets and follow us @spokanecity on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

How can a citizen report a problem?

Citizens can call 3-1-1 to report a problem. (Outside of the City limits, call 509.755.CITY (2489))

How does the City prepare for winter operations?

Each fall, the City tunes up the truck plows, graders, de-icers, and sanders in preparation for winter weather. We attach the plow blades to our trucks, make sure we have ready supplies of de-icer and sand, and ensure that contracts are in place with private contractors who can supplement our plow crews when needed. We step up monitoring of winter weather and are prepared to change our shifts. This year, we also bought 11 new truck plows and are creating new signage to assist our citizens.

What can citizens do?

For a successful snow season, citizens and businesses need to do their part.

Parking: The City is asking citizens to move their cars to the odd side of the street for the entire snow season, which runs from Nov. 15 to March 15. Within the downtown core from Maple to Division and I-90 to the Spokane River, cars will need to be moved out of on-street parking stalls between midnight and 6 a.m. when it snows. Recreational vehicles, boats, and trailers also need to be moved off the street before Nov. 15.

Sidewalk Snow Clearing: City ordinances and practicality demand that property owners clear the sidewalk adjacent to their properties. The City is asking citizens to clear a 36-inch pathway to allow school children, disabled individuals, bus riders, and other pedestrians to safely move through the community, with a goal of completing the work by 9 a.m. after a snowfall. Not everyone is capable of clearing sidewalks so neighbors should consider assisting seniors or disabled individuals with sidewalk shoveling.

What can citizens do to prepare in advance for snow season?

In advance of the snow season, make a winter plan:

- Move your recreational vehicle, boat or trailer off the street and to a winter storage location for the snow season.
- Make sure you have adequate snow shovels or a working snow blower. Consider buying some salt or sand.
- Consider signing up with a company that provides snow removal services before the snow flies if you don't want to shovel yourself.
- Figure out where you can park throughout the snow season, from Nov. 15 to March 15.
- Figure out what residential snow plow route you live in to make it easier to track the progress of plows.
- Make sure you know who in your neighborhood might need help with shoveling or other winter work and offer to help.

What will happen during future years?

The City will evaluate its experiences and those of our citizens during this first year of implementing the revamped snow response plan. We'll refine our plans as needed to keep improving our response to winter weather.