

# OPED Letter to the Community

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In last week's Gazette, it was reported that money was keeping the town from digging out Main Street. As your Mayor, I want to reply by saying that the safety of East Hartford residents is my number one priority, and as such, money is not keeping the town from digging out Main Street, but Mother Nature is. Let me explain in more detail.

For our community, January 2011 was the highest accumulation of snow ever measured. As quickly as it fell, we cleaned it up, and more fell. It fell faster than we could plow it. We plowed it higher than anyone of us born after 1944 has ever seen. Since taking office on January 10<sup>th</sup>, I have learned more about snow removal than I care to admit.

Here's how your town operates when the snow flies to keep you safe. In the hours leading up to a storm, all town Public Works and Parks employees are brought into work or carried over from their existing shifts to prepare equipment for the coming storm.

They gas the trucks and equipment and they fill the spreaders with magnesium chloride to melt the snow and ice as a pre-treatment measure. Pre-treating keeps accumulations down, makes snow cleanup a bit easier on the equipment, and allows the town to avoid having to sweep up and dispose of tons of contaminated sand in the spring. Pre-treating also prevents that wash boarding that occurs when snow and ice adheres to the road surface.

After pre-treating, 27 Town plows, mostly trucks but also a few front-end loaders, one giant snow blower, and 8 outside contractors plow 23 town routes totaling 150 miles; 300 miles if you count each side of the street. We use "end over end" plows which move the snow from left to right on the plow blade. With respect to clearing the roadway, these types of plows do not lift the snow up and over the snow banks very well, so in storms of more than one foot, we end up with very wide snow banks.

Sometimes a plow truck completing its route will move snow from the road over a cleared sidewalk or perhaps into a recently cleared driveway apron. I certainly apologize for that but having been in a plow truck on a ride-along during Storm Denis, it is a necessary evil of plowing. Please be assured that this does not happen on purpose.

With Storm Denis behind us, the town's Public Works and Parks Departments are returning to some neighborhoods to concentrate on clearing main and secondary routes for safe passage of two-way traffic. Route supervisors continue to identify roads within neighborhoods where snow banks need to be pushed back or removed, again to provide for safe passage of vehicles and to improve site lines.

Let's face it, to open up roads where a plow has proved ineffective to date, we must use the few front-end loaders and one giant snow blower we have, so working our way through 150 miles of roads is extremely slow.

Loading and trucking snow out of neighborhoods is also time-consuming, yet will continue, weather permitting and barring driver exhaustion, into the foreseeable future. Crosswalks will also be open on Main Street in the downtown area once safe travel is established town-wide. While Main Street is a State road and we seem to get little cooperation from the State with respect to clearing, we will none-the-less commit local resources to the downtown area in order to open up walking routes. Let's also remember that Connecticut Boulevard, Burnside Avenue, and Silver lane are also State roads. It's difficult for our community to add State responsibilities onto our plate when our plate is already full.

So to reemphasize, it is not for lack of money or effort that your street may not be as passable as you might usually expect, it is simply a matter of too much snow in too little time with too little specific equipment to deal with the accumulations we have received. Budget reductions over the years also have left us with fewer workers to clear the snow.

As of the writing of this letter, town Public Works and Parks employees, after working 96 hours on Storm Benedict and 30 hours more on Storm Denis, with a smaller storm sandwiched in between, have cleared Main Street sidewalks of snow.

While I have no control over Mother Nature with another possible blockbuster storm predicted for mid-week, I can tell you that East Hartford public safety is my only priority when the snow flies.

Our plow crews and support staff have performed remarkably and should be complimented for their tireless service to the community in this time of weather crisis.

Thank you for your patience as our community faces record breaking snow accumulations with more on the way. Let me also leave you with a few things to think about as we work our way through this winter:

1. Please do not plow or snow blow snow onto roadways since it creates a travel hazard.
2. Please keep streets clear of parked cars so we can more quickly to open up roads.
3. Please shovel your sidewalks within 8 daylight hours of the end of a storm.
4. Please keep hands and feet clear of your snow blower.
5. Please remove the snow around fire hydrants on your property in the event of a fire.
6. Please keep snow and ice clear of ventilation pipes to avoid the backup of CO2 fumes.
7. Please inspect your roof for signs of fatigue due to the weight of snow and ice.

East Hartford is fortunate to have dedicated employees at our disposal. These employees leave the comfort of their homes and families to ensure the safety of our residents. It takes the work of many: Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Police, Fire and our Inspections & Permits department to make this happen.

Mayor Marcia A. Leclerc