



## **City of Ithaca Department of Public Works Snowplowing Basics and Frequently Asked Questions**

It snows in Ithaca! The City of Ithaca receives an average of 65 inches of snow each year. Depending on other weather conditions before, during and after each snowstorm (such as temperature, amount of snowfall, days of sunshine, and rain events) the snow may melt shortly after falling, or may accumulate and stay on the ground for weeks. It may also partially melt and refreeze into ice.

There are approximately 65 miles of road in the City. This equates to nearly 150 miles of lanes to be plowed when including multiple lanes, on-street parking lanes, and both directions of travel.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) responds to snow storms by deploying truck mounted plows and spreading salt on the pavement to minimize icy conditions. DPW closely monitors weather forecasts to determine what will be required to ensure public safety. Our snow plow drivers have assigned areas and continuously monitor conditions of the roads. Snow plowing procedures and policies used by the City of Ithaca DPW are identical in most respects to those used in similar municipalities and climates.

### **Priorities**

The top priority for the City after a snowstorm is to clear travel lanes wide enough so police, fire, ambulance, and utility providers can respond to emergencies. Roads which carry the highest volume of traffic are cleared first. Small residential streets are cleared last. Steep roads are also prioritized to alleviate hazards such as uncontrolled sliding. Once minimum travel lanes are established, snow plows return to widen lanes and clear snow from the center of the road outward to the curbs or pavement edges by making multiple passes. Snow plows do not remove snow—they can only push snow to other locations. As plows work to widen travel lanes, more snow is pushed toward curblines until parking lanes are eventually re-established. When we experience back-to-back snowfall events and long periods of cold temperatures with little or no melting, this process can take several weeks because plows must return to previously plowed areas to maintain essential roadways.

### **Ice**

Ice is hazardous to vehicles and pedestrians. In many respects, the City's snow plowing efforts are a race to try and minimize the amount of snow turning to ice on our streets. When snow is not completely removed, vehicles and pedestrians eventually drive or walk over it and compact it into ice. This is often seen in on-street parking lanes and sidewalks which haven't been fully cleared. In severe cases or high-density areas, DPW will close down a street and actually remove the snow and ice by loading it into trucks and dumping it at our waterfront parks. But snow plows cannot remove ice. Ice must be melted with salt or removed with heavy construction equipment. While salt is a great tool, it loses effectiveness when the temperature drops below 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

## **Sidewalks**

The City Code requires sidewalks to be cleared of snow and ice by the adjoining property owner. Sidewalk segments that have not been cleared are sometimes cleared by DPW at a cost to the owner. This is required to remove or prevent icy conditions for pedestrians. DPW does not have the resources to clear all City sidewalks, nor does it target specific neighborhoods for sidewalk snow removal enforcement. We respond if we have available resources. When residents and volunteers step up to do their part or help a neighbor, Ithaca is a safer, better community.

## **Odd/Even Parking**

To facilitate clearing of snow to the curblin e or pavement edge (particularly in neighborhoods with high density housing and narrow streets such as Collegetown, Fall Creek, Southside and South Hill), the City of Ithaca has adopted an Odd/Even parking schedule. Until the past few years, the Odd/Even parking rules were in effect continuously from November 1<sup>st</sup> to April 1<sup>st</sup> whether there was snow or not. Recently, the City began implementing the Odd/Even rules only when needed for snow removal. Most cities that regularly plow snow have adopted an Odd/Even system or other methods of prohibiting parking in order to clear snow to the curblin e.

## **Balance**

DPW strives to balance the needs of the public. The City considers numerous and often conflicting suggestions, complaints, priorities, and opinions on the City's snow removal activities. DPW will always prioritize safety first, then convenience. Labor and equipment for additional snow removal capabilities are expensive, and the City must budget tax revenue to provide all important functions and services to the community throughout the year within that budget.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

The following are typical questions the City receives each year. There are also links to FAQs that other cities have published. The City of Ithaca is not unique in its response to snow storms.

### **I keep moving my car for Odd/Even parking but DPW doesn't remove the snow. Why does the City continue to use Odd/Even?**

There may be several reasons including:

- A heavy snow storm takes more time to clear roads. Plow drivers may not be able to get to every street. It is important to adhere to Odd/Even rules so that when a plow driver is available, the road will be ready for plowing. Once the snow starts turning into ice, there is less that the City can do.
- If one or two vehicles on the block are not in compliance with the Odd/Even rules, a plow's limited maneuverability severely restricts the driver's ability to clear the street to the curblin e.

### **Why is DPW working in the middle of the night when I'm trying to sleep?**

Snow storms are an inconvenience to the entire city. During heavy storms, snow crews are more effective at night because there is far less traffic. The City gets back to normal faster. If we don't take advantage of night work, there are more traffic, parking, and ice issues to address the following day because as time passes, snow turns to ice and becomes even more problematic and difficult to remove.

### **Why doesn't the City have a scheduled plan for snow plowing?**

There are too many variables for plow drivers to adhere to a rigid schedule when plowing. These variables include temperature, amount of snowfall, timing of snowfall, blocked roads from illegally parked vehicles, presence of ice, availability of plow drivers, and availability of equipment. Each plow driver has an assigned area in the City, and is responsible for using their own judgement to clear the assigned area based on observed conditions and accepted snow plowing procedures and priorities.

### **I just cleared my driveway and a snow plow just came by and blocked it with snow. Who is responsible for removal?**

As mentioned, plows move the snow from the center travel lanes outward to the curb or edge of pavement. When a plow pushes snow past a newly cleared driveway, the snow from the plow automatically fills the void. To prevent this from happening, you can clear snow from the left side of your curblane (as you face your street). When the plow goes by, snow from the plow will naturally empty itself into this space and not into your driveway. It is a little extra work up front, but can save time and frustration in the long run.

### **I just cleared my sidewalk and a snow plow just came by and covered it up again with snow. Who is responsible for removal?**

Unfortunately, this happens from time to time especially in high density neighborhoods where the sidewalk is immediately adjacent to the curb. The City Code requires that the property owner remove snow from the adjacent sidewalk, even if plows push snow back onto a cleared sidewalk.

### **Who is responsible for clearing corners near pedestrian crossings?**

The property owner of the corner property is responsible for clearing sidewalks on both roadways. ADA ramps at corners are eventually cleared by DPW, but staffing and equipment limitations often do not allow for immediate clearing. A smartphone app "Snow Angels" has been developed by the City to facilitate volunteers in the community to clear the corners in a timelier manner.

### **Why do I see plow trucks driving around with their plows up when they should be clearing the streets?**

There are a couple of possible reasons:

- They are travelling to their assigned plow areas
- There is ice on the road (snow plows can't plow ice) and they are spreading salt.
- They are monitoring street conditions and looking for problem areas that they can resolve with the plow.

## **SNOW REMOVAL LINKS ON OTHER MUNICIPAL WEBSITES**

The following links are a random sampling that show how other cities manage snow events. While each municipality has slightly different issues, the snow removal policies and procedures are very similar to our own.

Iowa City, IA: [Snow plowing 101 FAQ | City of Iowa City \(icgov.org\)](https://www.icgov.org/transportation/snowplowing-101-faq)

Providence, RI: [City of Providence Snow Ready - Frequently Asked Questions - City of Providence providenceri.gov](https://www.providenceri.gov/city-providence-snow-ready-frequently-asked-questions)

Bowie, MD: [Snow Removal FAQ | Bowie, MD - Official Website \(cityofbowie.org\)](https://www.cityofbowie.org/snow-removal-faq)

Madison, WI: [Snow Removal FAQs - Winter - Residents - City of Madison, Wisconsin](https://www.cityofmadison.com/winter-residents/snow-removal-faq)

Hubbard, MN: [Snowplowing Policy \(hubbard.mn.us\)](https://www.hubbard.mn.us/snowplowing-policy)

West Bend, WI: [Welcome to the City of West Bend, WI \(west-bend.wi.us\)](https://www.west-bend.wi.us/welcome-to-the-city-of-west-bend-wi)