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Common Council
Public Works Committee
West Allis, WI

RE: Snow and Ice Procedures

Dear Committee Members,

Last year, the Department of Building Inspection and Neighborhood Services (BINS) took over enforcement of snow and ice on public sidewalks from the Department of Public Works (DPW). The first snow season was a learning curve as those duties were transferred. DPW staff was extremely helpful in the transition, and we utilized their procedures and processes through the first year. Now that we have knowledge of how things have worked, BINS would like to propose a few changes to improve things for us and to get compliance faster. Here is a list of items BINS would like to see addressed through updates to ordinances or a resolution, the reasoning behind wanting it updated, and our proposed changes.

- 1. Continuous snow is a problem.** The current code reads that we have to wait 24 hours after the snow stops to do an initial inspection. If the snow starts up again before we can inspect it, contact our contractor and have them out to shovel, the whole process gets called off and we have to wait another 24 hours. This is a problem because if there is a small dusting of snow, the process starts all over again, and the neighbors have to live with the unshoveled sidewalk. This also makes the snow that is on it get more packed down, making it harder to remove. Our solution to this is to modify the code to read that shoveling shall be done at least 24 hours after a "snow event." We would then go on to define a "snow event" as an accumulation of more than 1/2" of snow.
For example, if we get 4 inches of snow that stops on Monday at 5:00 pm, residents would have until Tuesday at 5:00 pm to shovel. We would then inspect it on Wednesday and have our contractor shovel on Thursday. Under the current system, if we got a dusting of snow on Wednesday during the day, we would have to wait another 24 hours, inspect it on Friday, and schedule the contractor for Monday. If it snowed again over the weekend, it would all start over again. Under the proposed change, even if we get a dusting of snow on Wednesday, we would still continue on the original timeline and have it shoveled on Thursday.
- 2. Fees for snow and ice removal services should be increased.** In December of 2015, the Public Works Committee and Common Council approved a fee schedule of \$100 base fee per lot, plus \$0.50 per linear foot of sidewalk. In the last 3 years, fees for these types of services have increased. There is also a desire to hold commercial properties to a higher standard than residential properties. Commercial properties are often located on major streets which get more pedestrian traffic due to bus routes. Also, these commercial properties are much larger, so when a business does not shovel, a pedestrian will have to walk through a full city block of snow, instead of a 30' wide stretch of the block for a residential property. Commercial properties typically have no problem getting their parking lots plowed, but often forget to do the sidewalks which serve the public. BINS would like to propose two changes to the fee schedule. First, increase the linear foot rate for shoveling from \$0.50 per linear foot to \$1 per linear foot. Second, a two tier approach to the base fee of \$100 for a one- or two-family lot, and \$300 to a multi-family or commercial lot.

For example, a residential property that is 30' wide would currently get a bill for \$115 (\$100 base fee, plus \$0.50/linear foot). Under the new proposal, that same property would get a bill for \$130 (\$100 base fee plus \$1/linear foot). A commercial property with 260' of frontage currently would be charged \$230 (\$100 base fee and \$130 for the frontage). Under the proposal, it would be \$560 (\$300 base fee and \$260 for the frontage).

3. **Removal of snow at vacant or abandoned properties.** Currently, there is no policy in place to check vacant and abandoned properties sooner than regular properties. What this does is delays shoveling at a location where we know that nobody will be shoveling. This makes the snow compacted and harder to shovel later after we wait 24 hours, inspect it, schedule our contractor and then finally have them shovel it. BINS would like to be able to inspect and schedule shoveling of the snow at these properties immediately, without waiting for a full 24 hours when the property has been declared abandoned or vacant after the first snow of the season.
For example, if there is a vacant fast food restaurant on a major street in the City, and we have it declared a vacant or abandoned property, the first snow event of the year will work the same as any other. But for the subsequent snow events for the winter, we would then shovel it or remove ice any time we want to, regardless of the 24 hour wait period, and without further warning to a property owner.
4. **Door hangers could be utilized for last minute compliance.** Currently, if the snow is not shoveled after 24 hours, we schedule it, have the contractor shovel it, and send the homeowner a bill. There is no warning to them that we were by and are about to shovel it. This causes many upset people who thought they had extra time to shovel, or thought their shoveling job was adequate to meet the city code. BINS would like to give people that "last minute" warning to shovel before we have our contractors do it. We propose to leave a door hanger on the front door informing residents that we visited the house or business, noticed that the snow or ice needed to be removed, and our contractor will be out the next day. This door hanger will also explain the charges that they will incur from this. Hopefully, this will give people a warning and some time to shovel themselves before we have to do it. An argument could be made that some people don't go to their front doors every day, may not see it, or it may blow away. There is no requirement that we warn residents we are going to shovel their snow. This is a courtesy to them as a warning. If it works on half of the residences, then that is better than getting no warning out to them, and either way, they are required to know the rules and laws.
5. **Fire hydrants need to be shoveled out.** Having fire hydrants properly shoveled out save lives and property by buying the fire department valuable time in the event of a fire. Currently, it is strongly recommended that fire hydrants be shoveled out, and we have an "Adopt-a-Hydrant" program, but nothing in the actual municipal code to require it. By adding this in the code, we will save lives. On properties that do not shovel, we could also have our contractor shovel the hydrants out with an additional charge on the bill.
6. **Other changes?** As Council Members, you hear the complaints of your constituents regarding snow removal. If there are any other areas of improvement, BINS would gladly work that into any code proposal or change before it comes to the Council.

I would like to discuss these changes at the next Public Works Committee meeting to see if these are areas of the code that should be addressed, updated or changed. I welcome any questions you have now or at the meeting.

Sincerely,



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