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Snow Challenges and Solutions

While a beautiful blanket of fresh snow is something that most Alaskans love to see in the winter, it can sometimes cause headaches when it's time to leave the comfort of your home, get in your car, and head out for the day.

The City of Fairbanks Public Works Department maintains 355 lane miles of roadway, and one of their main goals is to assist in making commuting around Fairbanks as easy and convenient as possible for residents, business owners, and visitors. There are two separate snow removal operations. The first, during the storm itself and shortly thereafter, consists of quick passes with graders to keep priority roads, streets, and sidewalks passable. The second operation consists of widening roads by removing snow berms. The time required to plow or remove snow varies depending on many factors including: timing and duration of storms, extreme cold temperatures, equipment breakdowns, hauling distances, and available personnel to staff both day and night shifts. This means that while Public Works may be working as hard as possible, there are many factors that can impact snow removal operations from year to year.

This year we were able to get additional funding approved by the City Council to hire temporary snow removal operators in late December. We were very optimistic about our snow removal operations. Then we took a hit. Several snow blower breakdowns occurred, preventing the deployment of a night crew. This temporarily disrupted our ability to take care of the downtown core area as well as we wanted. Well running equipment is necessary for all operations, including the nighttime snow removal in the downtown area (it would be detrimental to the downtown businesses to try removing snow during the day while traffic is flowing and shops are being patronized).

Fortunately, we have been preparing for such issues and money had been set aside for the purchase of additional snowblowers! Even as the equipment breakdowns were happening in January, we had a new snowblower en route to Fairbanks. It is starting off as a rental unit that (if we are happy with its performance) we can purchase. The new snowblower has arrived, and the downtown area has since been serviced. Fairbanks experiences extreme weather conditions rarely seen in other parts of the country, and we will have to evaluate this new equipment over the next few months to see how it withstands these conditions. If this model works well, we have the funds to purchase additional ones that will be in service by the Fall of 2019.

I am a life-long resident of Fairbanks and I spend a great deal of time in our downtown area and all over the City, so please know that I, as well as my staff, am constantly assessing the snow situation and take your concerns very seriously. The mechanics, administrative staff, operators, and supervisors at Public Works are all working diligently on solutions for current and future snow operations. I'd like to thank all the businesses and residents that have shown patience while we work to make our operations better for this great city!

More information about snow removal can be found on our website (<https://www.fairbanksalaska.us/publicworks>), on the City of Fairbanks Facebook Page, or by calling 907-459-6770.