



DATE: January 10, 2022

TO: Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis and City Councilmembers

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SUBJECT: December 2021 Snowstorm Response Recap

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## **Introduction**

On December 20, 2021 our localized weather service extended forecast started to report the potential of a cold air mass moving into the area that could bring lowland snow. This notification put in motion staff across six departments in our City to initiate their emergency response plans for a major snow event. The following sections will describe how Transportation, Parks and Community Services, Utilities and Finance and Asset Management (FAM) prepared for and executed our response to snow on our roadways and at City facilities, and how the City Manager's Office, Parks and Fire supported the unhoused community in Bellevue.

## **Snow Response for Roadways and City Facilities**

Every year staff begins preparing for winter weather in the fall with our annual snow and ice training for over 100 staff across our Transportation, Utilities, Parks and Finance and Asset Management (FAM) Departments. This on-line and hands-on training covers all the protocols and procedures for responding to the event and teaches the hands-on skills needed to operate and maintain our plow equipment. We also stock up on all treatment materials we use during snow events. At the November 8, 2021 Council meeting, staff provided a brief presentation to Council to assure them and our residents that the City was winter weather ready. This early preparation proved to be especially valuable this year as we saw one of the earliest significant storms in over a decade.

Initial operations for this storm began on Christmas Eve when a small crew was brought in overnight to start pre-treating some of our higher hills to prevent ice conditions. All dispatch, maintenance and field crews were also put on standby for the holiday weekend. The event officially kicked off at 11 p.m. on December 25, 2021 when dispatch was opened and the first 12-hour shift started for snow response.

Plowing operations began in the early morning hours of December 26, 2021 when the snow began to accumulate at all elevations of the City. By mid-day on Monday, over six inches of snow blanketed all of Bellevue. With this storm came extremely cold conditions, keeping temperatures across Bellevue in the teens and low 20s for four straight days. This was ideal for plowing because we did not initially have to deal with ice, just compact snow. All our primary and secondary arterials were considered passable by the end of the day on Tuesday the 27<sup>th</sup> and crews were able to move into the neighborhood streets late that day and into Wednesday.

On Wednesday we began to prepare for a second snow event, which arrived on schedule early on Thursday, December 30<sup>th</sup>. This second round of snow required all plows to move back to the primary and secondary arterials until late afternoon on Thursday when they could start attacking the neighborhoods again. Plowing on neighborhood streets continued from New Year's weekend through Monday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

On January 3, we saw hail and freezing rain pass through the area late in the day, which created extremely icy roads for the morning commute and the first day of school following winter break on Tuesday, January 4<sup>th</sup>. All crews shifted to ice treatment in the early hours of Tuesday and throughout most of that day.

A segment of the Parks and Community Services Department staff also provided snow removal services for all City buildings. Parks staff began plowing and treatment operations late on December 25<sup>th</sup> and serviced every fire station and City Hall every two hours throughout each round of snow. This service also included the temporary men's shelter at the Lincoln Center off 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE in Wilburton. Once these priority sites were cleared, they moved onto other City facilities as they began re-opening. This effort continued through the ice event on January 4<sup>th</sup>. This operation involved a separate crew of eight people dedicated to these facilities.

As of the printing of this memo on Wednesday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, it is anticipated that 24-hour operations will end at 11 a.m. on Thursday, January 6<sup>th</sup>. This will end 13 days of 12 hour shifts for the nearly 70 staff from Transportation, Parks, Utilities and FAM involved in keeping our roadways and facilities accessible for essential services. These 13 days spanned two holiday weekends for the team.

Despite the long days and length of this event, morale stayed high amongst the team. Due to retirements, we had multiple staff working their first snow event. We trained five new plow drivers the first night of the event. The length of this event also provided the opportunity to train additional staff to support dispatch operations and administrative services. Our Fleets Maintenance team kept all our plows on the road almost 24 hours a day with very few maintenance issues. We also received rave reviews from the community. The following comment from a resident via Twitter on December 27<sup>th</sup> captures the success of our operations well:

*"Had to make a necessary trip from NW Bellevue to Factoria this morning and really appreciated all your team did to make the roads passable and my trip safe."*

## **Snow Response for the Unhoused Community**

The Homelessness Outreach Program in the City Manager's Office serves as a central coordination point in providing a One City approach to addressing and responding to the needs of Bellevue residents experiencing homelessness. As part of regular operations, Bellevue staff works closely with non-profit service providers and staff from other Eastside cities to coordinate services that support unhoused community members. The ongoing response to homelessness requires interjurisdictional cooperation, and this strategic approach is especially critical in cases of adverse weather.

Staff from the City Manager's Office, Parks and Community Services, and Bellevue Fire CARES, all played a role in anticipating, coordinating, communicating, and responding to the needs of unhoused residents during the winter storm. Over the fall, an interdepartmental team met to prepare for severe weather response needs for unhoused community members.

Specific actions to care for unhoused residents during the storm included:

- Staff participated in daily Eastside provider/City coordination calls to identify and address the emerging needs of unhoused residents and shelter operators.
- An updated list of shelter contacts and other resources was posted on the City website and social media for folks needing to move inside during the storm.
- Transportation plowed the driveway and parking lot at Lincoln Center to provide ease of access to the Men's Shelter.
- Community Centers were available with varying schedules throughout the week (staffing constraints due to road conditions) and the North Bellevue Community Center served three individuals in need of a daytime warming center.
- Congregations for the Homeless identified a need for additional warm clothes and blankets at the Men's Shelter. Communications posted a request for warming supplies on City social media accounts that generated community donations to CFH and other shelter providers.
- Bellevue Fire CARES delivered food to older adults unable to leave their homes, provided clothing for unhoused individuals with whom they interacted in the community, picked up prescriptions for community members unable to leave their homes and checked on community members known to be living outside or in their vehicles. They also provided shelter lists to all of the fire stations for crews to have on scene.

During the storm, shelter operators across the Eastside operated at full or expanded capacity, even under additional constraints posed by the COVID pandemic. Several shelters provided local hotel rooms to help maintain staffing levels for those who would otherwise have trouble getting to work in the storm. The King County Library System Peer Navigator at the Bellevue Library was available when the library was open to support unhoused folks and others needing a warm daytime location or access to other resources. The King County Regional Homelessness Authority also played a key role during the storm, collecting daily counts of folks served in each shelter, convening coordination calls and facilitating communication with the Department of Public Health

regarding COVID testing access, as well as identifying funding to help offset some emergency expenditures by our shelters.

Shelters on the Eastside collectively hosted approximately 250 individuals each night between December 23 and January 1. This includes upwards of 50 hotel vouchers that were made available with direct support from the Cities of Kirkland and Issaquah. Congregations for the Homeless temporarily provided an additional 20 beds and The Sophia Way/Sophia's Place provided an additional eight beds. On average, shelters were fully occupied throughout the storm, but thanks to temporarily expanded capacity and access to hotel vouchers, no one was turned away from shelter.

As we are now seeing adverse weather events almost every winter and summer, interdepartmental and interjurisdictional planning will be ongoing to further improve our responsiveness and support for the unhoused.