

Brighton-Pittsford Post – “From the Supervisor” column – March 3, 2016 issue
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

Snow Day

The intense snowfall on the morning of Tuesday, February 16, created inconvenience for everyone. Town-by-town, across the region affected, the story was the same: plows weren't clearing streets at the pace we're accustomed to see.

National Weather Service forecasts issued the night before the storm, and in the early morning hours before it hit, warned of up to a foot of snow around Rochester, but said the heaviest snow and most rapid snowfall would occur west or south of Monroe County. As the Democrat and Chronicle reported, the Weather Service updated that forecast only after rush-hour began, to state that we'd be receiving the worst of it.

Pittsford's snow crew didn't wait for the update. Our plows were on the job several hours earlier, starting at 4:00 AM. Just in case.

The Town uses 19 plows, one for each of 19 plowing routes that cover all 300 miles of road lanes in Pittsford. Each route comprises main roads, secondary roads and neighborhood streets.

We plow main roads first, to open them to emergency vehicles. Then each driver clears secondary and neighborhood streets, but returns to main roads as needed, to keep them open. We cannot responsibly proceed otherwise. When snow falls rapidly and heavily, plows must divert from neighborhoods to return to the main roads. This was precisely the situation on February 16.

The storm dropped 2 inches per hour for 9 hours or more. The snow was wet and heavy. It may have been the most sustained rapid accumulation of heavy snow since a Christmas Eve storm in 1978. Our crews had to re-plow main roads every few hours.

Vehicles stuck in the snow made matters worse throughout the day. In many places they had to be removed before the plows could pass. And in conditions this severe, even the plows themselves can get stuck.

The brunt of the storm hit at the worst possible time, during morning rush hour. Of course this compounded all of the other difficulties.

For these reasons it took far longer than usual to plow residential neighborhoods. Normally it takes 3 to 4 hours to complete a plow route. In the recent storm it took most of our plows twice that long, and on some of the plow routes even longer.

You should know that, throughout snowstorms, our Highway Department keeps in touch with the Fire Department and through it, the ambulance services. Also with the Sheriff. If first responders need to get to a street that's snowbound, we can divert a plow to get them where they need to be.

You should know also that, in circumstances as unusual as those of February 16, another factor can slow our crews a bit: extending a helping hand to those of you who need it. I've heard from a number of residents about this.

Town crews stopped into businesses using municipal parking lots to let snowbound employees know the lots were clear so they could make their way home. Our crews then helped these employees dig out their cars and push them to the plowed area, so they could be on their way. All over town our crews dug out stuck motorists. One stopped to put out a car fire, using extinguishers from the plowing truck. Onlookers cheered and waved as they continued on their way to resume plowing.

It happens the other way around, too. In one neighborhood, a group of residents helped to move cars blocking the plow. In another, residents directed traffic so our crews could open a blocked intersection and plow the street beyond it. In another, where our driver found himself repeatedly stuck during the heaviest period of snow, residents followed his plow with their own shovels and a snow blower, and kept him moving. One resident walked down the driveway in the heavy snow and summoned the plow to stop. She had pumpkin bread and hot chocolate for the crew – especially appreciated on a day that allowed for no lunch breaks. Another resident had pizza delivered to the Highway Department.

Scenes like these took place throughout Snow Day. They say a lot about the character of our community.

And perhaps it says something about the splendid performance of Pittsford's highway crews time after time that, when conditions not seen in decades get between them and accomplishing their usual exemplary results in the usual time, it's noticeable. For their perseverance and determination on that troublesome day we may all be grateful.

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