

Brighton-Pittsford Post – “From the Supervisor” column – submitted for December 15, 2016 issue
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

Leaves, Leaves Everywhere

Pittsford’s Highway Department has received more calls this season asking about leaf pick up than in any other year I can remember. So has Town Hall.

That’s because, also more than in any other year I can remember, a particular combination of weather-driven factors have posed a particular challenge to our road crews in their work collecting leaves.

Many of you will know that it’s the same Highway Department crews that undertake both leaf pickup and snow plowing. The same crews, using the same trucks. The trucks are fitted with leaf-collection equipment for leaf season and with plowing equipment for snow season. The cost to taxpayers of providing these services would be substantially higher if we were to maintain separate crews and separate equipment for each task.

Of course we must anticipate some overlap between leaf season and snow season each year. We do and we provide for it appropriately with both staff and equipment. This year the overlap has been much more substantial than in recent years past.

We’ve had a late fall. Leaves began dropping noticeably later than in most years. The great bulk of them dropped late. Then, as we got under way once the bulk of the leaves dropped, a large snow fell a few weeks ago. Our crews had to decouple the leaf equipment and affix the plows to our trucks. Once they finished cleaning snow from the roads, the same conversion took place in reverse. Then leaf pickup resumed.

If there was a period where you noticed a longer gap than usual since the most recent leaf pick-up in your neighborhood, now you know why. Over the weeks since that first substantial snow of the season, our crews have worked flat-out to catch up. They continue to do so.

You may notice our crews using front-end loaders to remove leaves, instead of the leaf vacuum trucks. The leaf vacuums don’t work well with wet leaves. Leaf piles in most places were wet from melting snow for some weeks after that first snow. Getting the job done meant going to Plan B: the front-end loaders. The front-end loaders leave behind more debris than the leaf vacuum. That’s why they comprise Plan B, not Plan A.

As I write this, a week before publication, we’ve had a few days of drier weather. Many of the leaf piles have dried out. This makes it possible for our Highway crews to vacuum the leaves again. If the weather continues to give us a break, our crews will be circling back through the Town to clean up leaves remaining from the earlier front-end pickups and to remove any further roadside accumulations of leaves. If we have another heavy snow again soon, before all the leaves are collected, it will impede our progress.

A television ad from my youth sported the tagline, “It’s not nice to fool Mother Nature.” What the ad didn’t say was, “It’s also not possible to fool Mother Nature.” Or to ask her to hold off on the

snow until we're done with the leaves. We can simply do our best to work around her. Come what may, our Highway Department, as ever, will persevere until the job is done.

Not all local municipalities include leaf pickup among the municipal services they provide. In Pittsford we consider it a necessary and proper function of the Town government. We will continue to staff this service and equip it in a way mindful of the interests of the Town's taxpayers, even if that means it might take somewhat longer under unusual circumstances that we encounter only rarely.

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