

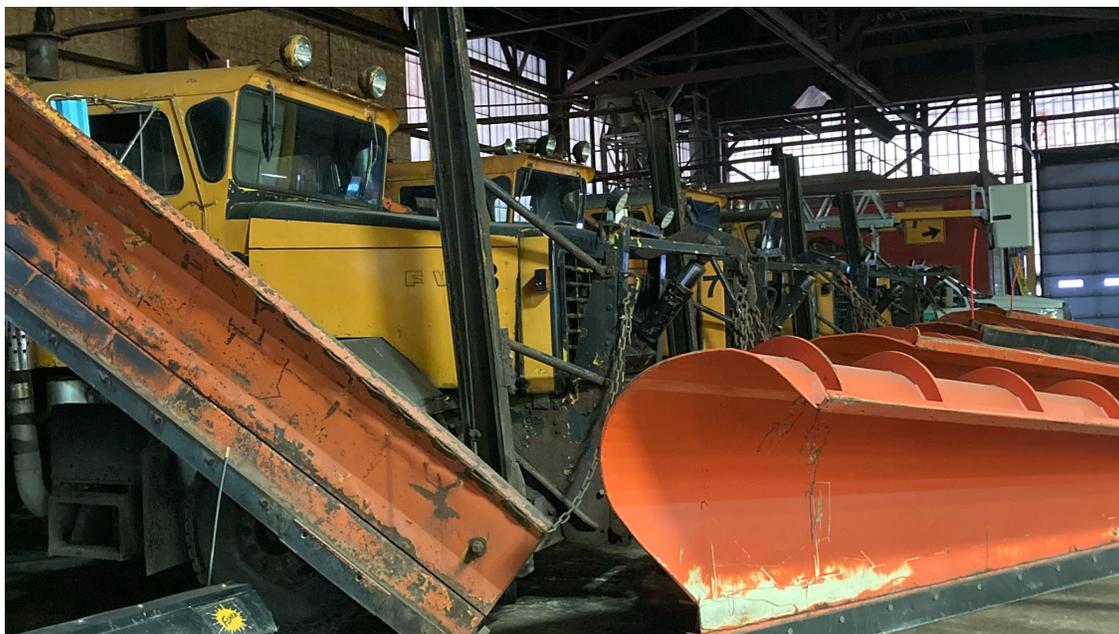
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Beginning this month, I am sending out a mid-month Newsletter devoted to one particular topic of government in the City of Utica. The idea is to explain in adequate detail one particular facet or function of government. It is January, and it is snowing, so snow plowing seems like a good place to begin. Have an idea of something you'd like explained? Let me know. Think I got some detail wrong, or left some part out? Again, let me know. I'm always glad to hear from you.



Utica has 248 miles of roads. For purposes of snowplowing, the City is divided into 13 routes, spread out pretty evenly across the City. (South Utica has two routes.) A single route is made up of many separate and contiguous "loops" and takes anywhere from 6-8 hours to complete. Each street takes at least two passes to be cleared of snow. Wider roads, such as Genesee, take at least four. Plowing starts in the center of the road, and works the snow out to the edge. Each route is assigned permanently to one of our DPW plow drivers. Because they are permanently assigned to their routes, they learn the route, its streets, and the particular challenges that route presents. Each plow truck has two people in it: a driver and a

“wingman” who helps guide the driver. We start plowing as soon as the snow starts falling, and keep plowing until the streets are clear. This means that in a major storm, drivers are plowing all night, and well into the day, until the streets are clear. (When practical, the DPW prefers to plow at night, when there is less traffic to contend with.) So if you think that a lot of snow has already fallen, but your street isn't clear yet, it may simply be that your street got cleared, but snow has continued to fall and build up on the streets.

Snow plowing is a matter, most basically, of scraping the snow that has fallen onto the street, and pushing it to the side of the road. As snow continues to fall, and continues to be pushed to the side of the road, it builds up and creates a snow bank. Part of the skill of plowing is to be able to use the plow to both scrape the road and pile the snow up into a bank. But this also means that there is simply no way to move snow from the road to the side of the road and not deposit some of it at the ends of our driveways. And yes, that snow is wet, compacted, and heavy. It is easy to be frustrated to clear your own driveway and then have the plow come by and deposit more snow there. But, and THIS IS IMPORTANT, there is simply no other way to move the snow off the road.

Major arteries and roads with bus routes get first priority because they get the most traffic. If your side street has been plowed, but Genesee Street or Sunset Ave hasn't, then you still can't get anywhere. So be patient. They will get to you.

The City currently owns 12 trucks, of a few sorts, including two-tier Mack trucks, which can be equipped with a salter in the winter, and a dump truck for the rest of the year. The DPW works hard to maintain these trucks, and the oldest is 33 years old! Plows, and those two-tier trucks, can cost as much as a quarter of a million dollars, so for those who suggest that we need to buy more plows and trucks, please consider which other City service you would be willing to forgo so that the streets get cleared a little quicker.

A City like Utica is challenging to plow. There are lots of short streets, we have plenty of hills (think Higby, or Holland where it joins up with Oneida), and there are cars, poles, low curbs, and so on to deal with. So plowing a City like Utica is not at all like plowing the arterial or the thruway, which is essentially one long straight road, and considerably easier to plow than our City. It is also a challenge to fully staff the DPW. Most of our drivers are young. Applicants must have a CDL permit, and the DPW will finish their training and help new employees get their license. (“CDL” is a Commercial Driver's License, and allows licensees to drive the plows that the City uses.) The DPW does not get nearly as many applicants as it used to, and this is true for other cities as well. (So, if you know a young person who wants a good stable job with good benefits, encourage them to look into getting a CDL permit. This is another one of the trades jobs that are too often overlooked by young people who want good, well-paid work.)

The biggest challenging to plowing is the problem of predicting how much snow will

fall and when. As a City, we have to be prepared for the snow if it does come, but when it doesn't, we have set aside resources that we may not end up using. And these days, in a climate that HAS changed, this has become even more challenging.

Want to help? Please keep your cars out of the road and out of the way! In a Snow Emergency, this is absolutely required. But anytime the City is plowing, cars parked on the road are in the way and force plow drivers to leave a lot of snow in the roads. Don't move snow out of your driveway and INTO the roads, especially after the plows have already come through. Try to resist calling the DPW to complain that they haven't done your road yet, especially while the plows are still out and everyone is working hard. And lastly, please keep in mind that these plow drivers are working hard, and by the time you see them they may have been working hard all night. So give them a grateful wave as they drive by.

So there you have it. Now you know the basic facts about how plowing works here in Utica. I hope that you now know more about how this part of your government works. Stay tuned for future "How Utica Works" newsletters. And as always, spread the goodness by forwarding this email and encouraging others to sign up for themselves.



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