

Official Minutes of the City of Mount Rainier

MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING: SNOW RESPONSE AND REMOVAL

DATE: February 23, 2016

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, UPPER LEVEL CITY HALL

Call to Order

7:00 PM, Council Chambers, City Hall, One Municipal Place, Mount Rainier MD

Presiding Officer

Councilmember Bryan Knedler

Officials Present

Mayor Malinda Miles (via phone)

Councilmember Tracy Loh

Councilmember Shivali Shah

Officials Absent

Councilmember Jesse Christopherson

Staff Present

Interim City Manager Larry Hughes

City Assistant Manager Veronica Owens

Minutes provided by:

Brishay Corbin

AGENDA

Snow Response

Informational Meeting

Police Department Summary – Chief Michael Scott

The day before the storm we had a meeting with the staff and determined when we would declare a “snow emergency”. We started our normal door-to-door and

fliers' process in all the affected apartment complexes and we contacted Kay Management who put out their own fliers on their residents' vehicles.

We waited approximately 3 hours after the snow started falling on Friday, once Public Works began treating and plowing, to begin ticketing and towing on the emergency exit routes. In total we ticketed and towed 9 cars which was a better response from residences this year. We also participated on Monday by reviewing and listing every street in the City that needed the most attention.

Councilman Bryan Knedler: What would you attribute to the better response?

Chief Scott: We used social media outlets like, Twitter and Facebook, and the management of the apartment complexes told residents who live on a snow emergency route to move their cars when they hear the announcements, also, distributing our notices early.

Councilman Bryan Knedler: From the police standpoint is there anything we could've done better?

Chief Scott: We need to continue to be as on top of our notifications as possible.

Veronica Owens: We need a designated person to assist Public Works and also a time in the morning and afternoon when communications go out to the public.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: A designated staff member has been taken care of.

Mayor Miles: There is a statement that says the equipment has been serviced and we should know exactly what that service is. We should also know what emergency routes are the most difficult for Public Works to clear like 34th street. We need to have at least 2 good contractors and a 3rd on standby along with a Public Works' Director.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: On the report it says we checked our equipment Wednesday and that it was in good condition but every single piece of equipment we have was broken at least once in the storm, so this is inaccurate. I would like an honest assessment from Public Works about each piece of equipment. I'd like an inventory that lists each piece of snow removal equipment, how old it is, and their assessment of what condition it's really in.

Mayor Miles: In addition to looking at equipment we should also think about the cost of a mechanic, even on a part-time basis, to make sure equipment works.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: Public Works needs to make this list so that it can be part of the budgeting process.

Councilman Bryan Knedler: There's a request for smaller plows but I would be concerned getting something less powerful. I understand we have narrow streets but we shouldn't allow parking on those sides like we do.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: What's the status on snow chains?

Interim City Manager Larry Hughes: They break easily.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: I agree we should probably get rid of the dump truck and plow. The best plow we borrowed was from Hyattsville. It was custom built but I would be interested in seeing how much it would cost. I also think we need a 2nd bobcat.

Public Comment

Ethan Stone, Varnum Street: I agree most of the public wouldn't say things went okay during the storm. I think the public is well aware that there were a number of equipment issues but I don't know if there was an explanation as to why that was. I have a little emergency snow experience from a mountain area and what I've seen before is, in addition to the snow emergency routes, the next priority was bridges, hills, and turns. If we're expecting a major event we need to make sure we have coverage in more places and should also have a pre-defined shift schedule to make sure we have fresh people in the rotation; including temporary additional staff. I felt the communications were good and I felt the City and representatives were active on social media like listerve and Facebook.

Mayor Miles: We may need to compile a list of residents who are licensed (Commercial Driver's License) that we can call on to help us. We also need to make sure our liability insurance gives us the authority to make temporary calls.

Dina, 3200 Block Upshur Street: I thought that DPW did an excellent job but in regards to communication a lot of seniors are not on social media and have no idea what's going on. Residents pulled together and utilized their resources to help. When you're saying "designated staff," there's still administrative support like a Director needed to make those decisions. I'm also concerned with my car

due to the potholes and now the salt on 34th street. What's the City planning to do about the aftermath?

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: WSSC (Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission) is well aware that they need to continue making progress on their project so that they can resurface 34th street, but there has been a delay due to the weather.

Mayor Miles: We also need to look at the number of humps that were moved or knocked out during the snow plowing to see if we're getting the best value for our money.

Chief Scott: In regards to prioritizing hills in the City; our main priority is to keep emergency routes open but that's mainly because those are bus routes. If there are no Metro buses running, due to a large storm, do we need to keep those streets open as a higher priority to our hills?

Councilman Bryan Knedler: I think we also need to talk to the Fire Department to see what makes sense because some of the emergency routes are our main roads. Also, why wasn't the barricade at Perry St. and 31st St. opened? The plow got stuck there because it couldn't turn.

Interim City Manager Larry Hughes: I think so much was going on Public Works just didn't happen.

Councilman Bryan Knedler: That would also be a street I would like to restrict parking to one side.

Mayor Miles: By law the County only lets the residents' park on one side of the street so maybe we need to look into that.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: In regards to our contractor it says that he supplied a truck with a blade to push snow. I would like to hear an evaluation of the quality of that piece of equipment, how it contributed, and whether we are getting value for money. It's obvious there are equipment issues. I was impressed with how hard the contractor worked but I think we need to express feedback about what happened with the equipment with guarantees that it won't happen again. He went over 24 hours with no front end loader and borrowed the City's bobcat so these issues should also be reflected in his invoice.

Councilwoman Shivali Shah: There are a lot of details that are missing from this

report that are essential and, in addition to updating this document, we might want to recreate the snow removal committee that has knowledge and can help.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: We can solve 90% of our problem by hiring a Director for Public Works, giving them these notes, sorting out equipment issues, and taking a look at our contractor.

Mayor Miles: The Emergency Preparedness Plan is supposed to address communications such as who's speaking to the press and residents; the commanders would be the City Manager and Chief of Police, while the rest of us provide the information. I asked the Chief to bring it back with some revisions and maybe that's something we need to take a look at as a Council.

Councilman Bryan Knedler: I would like to see the report from the snow emergency committee in 2010 because it will be valuable to see what the problems were and their suggestions.

Councilwoman Shivali Shah: In terms of reconvening the Emergency Preparedness Plan committee the people who have CDLs would come in handy especially while we don't have a Public Works' Director.

Final Comments

Chief Scott: I'd also like to give thanks to the Mount Rainier Business Association Clean and Safe Team we hired who cleared the business district and were a tremendous help.

Councilwoman Tracy Loh: We have to be serious about holding businesses along Queens Chapel Road responsible for snow removal. We also need to be realistic that the County is not going to plow the trail.

Mayor Miles: I suggest that we send a letter to the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (MNCPPC) letting them know that it's their responsibility and we expect the trail to be one of their top priorities in the future.

Motion to Adjourn: Councilman Bryan Knedler

Mover: Councilwoman Tracy Loh

Second: Councilwoman Shivali Shah

Ayes: Councilwoman Tracy Loh, Assistant City Manager Veronica Owens,

Informational Meeting

Interim City Manager Larry Hughes: In November an inner-municipal bikeways working group asked us to enter a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) agreeing to coordinate on bike trails. It just needs the Mayor's signature.

And, we have a company called Complus who administers our parking meters and also has a company who does collections for delinquent parking tickets and we have more than a million dollars' worth of debt, but we can expand that contract.

Chief Scott: We tried to go through Complus but we hadn't done collections because their subsidiary company wanted to add 30% in addition to what they collected. We don't have anyone doing collections for us so we have \$1.4 million still owed to us in unpaid parking citations which doesn't include the \$800,000.00 due in unpaid speed camera systems.

Councilman Bryan Knedler: We're not going to take in that amount?

Interim City Manager Larry Hughes: Approximately 48% of it.