

August 5, 2014

Mr. Jay Fiset
Chairman, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Mr. Fiset,

We are writing on behalf of the Cherrydale Citizens' Association to express concern over the County's snow removal process. We have had repeated issues with streets never being touched by a plow or salt truck, even days after the snow stopped falling. This presents safety and hazard concerns. Having thought about this carefully and exchanged brisk and frequent discussions on our listserve we have some suggestions that we believe would be reasonable, practical, expeditious and not expensive. Please consider and share with the various departments (i.e. DES, Parks, Schools and Libraries), each of which has a role in snow removal, but do not coordinate together well.

1. Problem: Public safety is jeopardized by the County's system of clearing library and rec center parking lots prior to clearing streets. Streets should ALWAYS take priority as they provide access to occupied dwellings while the libraries and rec centers are closed. Several years ago, a fire truck could not reach a car fire due to the untreated roads, over 24 hours after the snow had stopped falling. Concurrently, the County had already plowed out all of the neighboring library and rec center parking lots. During the late snowfall in March 2014, a firetruck got stuck while running a medical call on an untreated street in Cherrydale. It took 45 minutes to get the truck unstuck. Many streets were untreated, yet at the same time the fire truck was stuck, the County had already cleared at least six different library and rec center parking lots completely.

Solution: ALL STREETS, not just major arterials, must be prioritized for treatment BEFORE parking lots. Once ALL streets have been sufficiently treated, then resources should be directed to secondary priorities such as parking lots, bike paths, etc. Trucks from Parks and Recreation Department, which are assigned to clear parking lots, should be utilized to assist DES to clear streets FIRST. The County certainly has a choice: dedicate its trucks to clearing parking lots or rec centers and libraries first, or to streets first. If you don't clear streets, schools cannot reopen, and it presents a public safety hazard.

2. Problem: There is no plan to automatically call in extra help for larger storms. The County seems to struggle to handle any snowfall above 5 inches. Resources are overtaxed and many streets never get touched. This past winter, a number of streets were never salted or plowed, even 48 hours after the storm. As a result, public safety is jeopardized by unpassable and slippery streets, and schools cannot safely reopen. During Snomageddon in 2010, there were streets never treated even 6 days after the storm, and many citizens had to shovel out their own streets.

Solution: The County should have a more comprehensive plan to automatically call in contractors to assist with larger storms (we would suggest any storm over 5 inches). The level of contractor assistance could be tiered: more contractors are requested for larger storms. In addition, the County should hire a consultant to review its snow removal plan and determine how much extra outside assistance is needed. There needs to be calculations performed as to how many miles of streets a truck can handle given "X" number of inches of snow. Based on this, you can estimate how many additional trucks are needed when "X" inches of snow are predicted.

3. Problem: The County's snow removal plan is very basic, designating certain streets as higher priority. Beyond this, DES divides trucks into zones and relies on drivers to cover streets within a zone. There is NO SYSTEM to track what streets have been treated and to ensure streets are not missed. DES maintains a list of "Frequently Missed Streets" which implies a chronic problem of missing streets. Even with this list, we have discovered that streets designated on this list are STILL MISSED.

Solution: The goal should be to eliminate the list of frequently missed streets. The addition of low cost GPS tracking/mapping would show what streets have not been treated. A better system needs to be created to assign trucks within a zone to cover specific streets.

4. Problem: Many narrow and dead end streets are chronically missed because the larger trucks cannot negotiate them. There is NO systematic plan to assign smaller pickup trucks to the narrow and dead end streets. As a result, many streets are missed. This problem was addressed with the Assistant County Manager in 2010 who assured one citizen that their street would have a smaller truck assigned for future storms. Despite this, according to the DES Chief, there is no such plan in place to assign smaller trucks to narrow and dead end streets.

Solution: Determine which streets cannot be treated by the larger trucks and then divide the county into zones and assign smaller trucks to handle these streets. If DES does not have a sufficient number of smaller pickup-style trucks to clear these streets, then the fleet from Parks and Libraries should be called in to assist, and if necessary, contractors should be used.

5. Problem: The County is using 2-wheel drive pickup trucks in some cases to clear streets. This is hazardous. During the storm in February, there were several cases of these trucks getting stuck. In one case, a 2-wheel drive truck was stuck for nearly 1 hour, and citizens had to move four cars so that the truck would not slide into their cars. Exacerbating this problem was the fact that the 2-wheel drive trucks did not even have chains, so they had poor traction. One County worker said to a citizen, "I don't know why they are sending us out here with 2-wheel drive trucks." The use of the 2-wheel drive trucks is hazardous, especially in icy or deeper snowfalls.

Solution: Stop using 2-wheel drive pickup trucks to treat streets. It would be safer for the County to use contractors with 4-wheel drive trucks.

The Cherrydale community feels these issues must be addressed so that we do not have a repeat of these problems next winter.

Sincerest Regards,

Maureen Ross, President Cherrydale Citizens Association, and Reade Bush, Snow Removal Committee

Cc: County Manager Barbara Donnellan