



Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)

January 6, 2011

TO: Sarah Reiter, Chair, Downtown Coordinating Committee
Kevin Briski, Madison Parks Superintendent

CC: Ray Harmon, Mayoral Aide
Ald. Mike Verveer
Ald. Bryon Eagon

FROM: Board of Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)

RE: Mall Maintenance snow removal review

The BID Board supports the Downtown Coordinating Committee's (DCC) decision to review Mall Maintenance snow removal for the December 11-12 storm at the Committee's Jan. 20 meeting.

The BID Board asks the DCC, as the city committee that considers and makes recommendations on maintenance and operation of the downtown, to work with Parks and Mall Maintenance staff and stakeholders to identify ways to improve snow removal within the service area, including improved planning for predicted snowstorms, and communication with business and property owners. The BID is happy to continue serving as a resource for communicating with central downtown business and property owners, and looks forward to participating as a constructive partner in this review.

Background:

Good snow removal, especially during the December holiday shopping season, is extremely important for the economic health of the central downtown.

As an organization representing property and business owners within the Mall Maintenance service area, the BID received many complaints from business and property owners—as well as customers—about the snow removal and unsafe sidewalk conditions within the service area following the Dec. 11-12 storm. We received a number of reports of people falling on sidewalks covered with icy compacted snow that had not been removed before freezing.

For a major retail area comprised mainly of locally-owned small businesses, December is a critical month. One holiday shopping weekend can literally make or break a business's profitability for the year. Unfortunately, the problems with snow removal and subsequent poor customer experience had a negative impact on downtown businesses. When I surveyed businesses about their downtown holiday sales, I received the comments such as:

Our holiday season was very slow; I've never seen anything like it in any of my retail jobs. Business picked up a lot the week of Christmas and the week after, but the weeks leading up to it were some of the slowest I've ever witnessed. Compared to previous years, we were down

about 7-10% average. I don't think it was a question of product as much as it was an issue of the weather. We got hit with the blizzard, and then the city really didn't do as well as it could have to ensure that downtown sidewalks and streets were as clear as they could have been. The sidewalks on State Street didn't get cleared of the ice that was packed on them until the week before Christmas, which I think may have deterred some shoppers as well, because who wants to try and navigate through slippery ice and snow?

One thing I noticed was that the amount of traffic on the street seemed less than last year. Evenings were overall very slow until the last week before Christmas . . . I definitely think [the icy sidewalks] slowed people down and they did not walk around as much to shop. It seemed they were going to specific places then leaving. Lots of people commented about the poor slippery conditions and were concerned for their safety when using the sidewalks, me included!

Recommendations:

Recognizing that Mall Maintenance staff work hard within available resources, the BID Board support a Mall Maintenance snow removal plan that is both efficient and timely.

Specific recommendations include:

- Improved planning for staff deployment for predicted snowstorms, so that snow is removed during major snowfalls rather than afterwards, which would result in both improved service and more efficient use of staff resources.
- Improved communication with those in the service area, including better information about which frontages and sidewalks Mall Maintenance removes snow and which it does not. Specific suggestions:
 - Include a map of the service area, description of services, and Mall Maintenance contact information in the annual mailing of notice of special charges;
 - Implement a Mall Maintenance page on the Parks website, which includes the above information.

We look forward to constructive discussion, and to offering and hearing specific suggestions from Parks staff, committee members and the public at the January 20 Downtown Coordinating Committee meeting.

On behalf of the BID Board of Directors,



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