

Plowing Subdivisions in Washtenaw County

BACKGROUND

Back when Washtenaw County townships were largely rural, residents knew they lived “in the country” and expected snow removal services reflective of their rural environment. Today, however, many of the county’s townships have urbanized with subdivisions, shopping centers, schools and businesses.

As a result, the demand for winter road maintenance services has increased dramatically. Unfortunately, funding for road maintenance – which comes primarily from the state motor fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees, not your property taxes – has not kept pace with this growth and inflationary costs. That means the expectations of some township residents sometimes exceeds the ability to provide those services.



PLOWING SUBDIVISION ROADS

The Washtenaw County Road Commission (WCRC) prides itself on its ability to promptly clear its roads following a normal winter storm.

However, following a major storm (extremely hazardous driving conditions existing on major highways and roads with heavy snow and/or ice, severe drifting, and/or limited visibility), subdivision roads in townships may not be cleared for a few days.



WCRC PRIORITIES

The WCRC is responsible for maintaining more than 1,650 centerline miles of county roads, in addition to maintaining 581 lane miles of state highways in the county. The WCRC has 46 salt trucks / snowplows that can be on the road at any given time during a winter storm event. Additionally, the WCRC has 11 “road graders” (large vehicles with a “blade” underneath used to smooth unpaved roads in the summer) that are deployed during major storms.

The WCRC does not have the equipment or manpower to clear all its roads at the same time. If we invested the amount of money required to acquire the equipment and staff necessary to clear all our roads immediately following a major winter storm, we would not be

able to perform other necessary road maintenance activities. These other important activities include patching potholes, repairing traffic signals and signs, repairing guardrails, grading unpaved roads, dust control, etc. It would not be fiscally responsible for the WCRC to acquire the staff and equipment to be able to respond instantly to the type of winter storm that occurs infrequently. Therefore, the WCRC must prioritize which roads are cleared first.

WCRC has a formal policy which establishes the priority system for winter road maintenance. The policy indicates that roads will be cleared in the following order:

Priority 1 – State Trunklines (I-94, US-23, M-14, etc.)

Priority 2 – High volume paved roads

Priority 3 – Medium volume paved roads

Priority 4 – Subdivision roads

Priority 5 – Unpaved roads

Due to limited resources, the WCRC does not perform winter maintenance on subdivision roads during overtime unless: (1) at least four inches of snow has fallen; (2) we’ve had an ice storm; or (3) blowing and drifting is occurring that interferes with vehicular travel. A variety of factors also affect response time, including temperature, frequency of snowfall, time of day, type of precipitation, etc.

SUBDIVISION ROADS

Although important to abutting property owners, subdivision roads are a lower priority for the following reasons: (1) Trunkline, primary, and collector roads support commerce and deliveries to regional and local businesses; (2) Subdivision roads carry less traffic than other roads. Public safety dictates that roads with higher volumes and speeds are top priorities; (3) Emergency vehicles and school buses cannot get to subdivision roads if primary and collector roads are not cleared first; and (4) Likewise, local residents cannot get to their points of destination if trunkline, arterial, and collector roadways are impassable.



WINTER STORM REALITY CHECK

Back-to-back winter storm events frequently require plow trucks to stay on higher priority routes. Under these circumstances, it could be four or more days before WCRC begins clearing subdivision roads.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

While the WCRC is performing winter road maintenance in township subdivisions, there are also some things homeowners can do to help the WCRC provide the best service possible. These include:

- ❄ Remove vehicles from roads during and after winter storms.
- ❄ Be willing to shovel around your mailbox and at the end of your driveway after the WCRC plow comes by. Because of the sheer volume of roads, WCRC trucks cannot plow the ends of driveways or around mailboxes. Due to the nature of plowing, our trucks will often push snow into driveways or in front of mail boxes.
- ❄ During, or shortly after, winter storms do not place garbage cans in the road. It is difficult to plow a subdivision road that is lined with garbage cans.
- ❄ Avoid placing rocks at the edge of the road. When it snows, our drivers can't see these objects. They often get pushed onto the lawn, causing damage both to your lawn and WCRC equipment.
- ❄ Avoid installing in-ground sprinkler heads in the road right-of-way. If our driver cannot see your lawn, he or she may accidentally damage a sprinkler head.
- ❄ Before winter starts, check your mailbox and post to ensure they are secure. If the mailbox and post aren't secure, they will likely be damaged due to the force of the snow thrown from the snowplow.

WCRC MISSION STATEMENT

The Washtenaw County Road Commission is responsible for maintaining a road system that is reasonably safe and convenient to the traveling public.

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QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

CONTACT US AT:

555 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor • MI • 48103
Phone: 734-761-1500
Fax: 734-761-3239
E-mail: wrc@wcroads.org
www.wcroads.org

Office Hours: 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

WASHTENAW COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION
555 N. Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

www.wcroads.org

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What to Expect During and After Winter Storms

