



BY AMY HUNT / SOUTH END RESIDENT

Snow clearance: my view (and queries) from my wheelchair

I'm a wheelchair-using paraplegic. Over the next few months, you may spot me on the streets, in traffic, traveling alongside cars, cabs, buses, trucks and Ubers. It's risky, but it's where the City of Boston puts me after it snows.

After a storm, the plows push mounds of snow onto street corners, covering curb ramps—the slopes at the end of sidewalks that make it possible for wheelchair users to cross the street. Without curb ramps, I'm going nowhere. So I make my way into traffic.

And I have questions.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates curb ramps. But does the ADA have an opinion about ramps getting covered by four feet of snow?

The City expects residents who live closest to street corners to clear the snow piles it creates when contractors plow the street. According to Boston.gov, corner residents have three hours after a storm ends to get it done. That doesn't consider the possibility of a 72-year-old Aunt Mae living in the corner property.

Snow piles can grow to four, five, even six feet tall and wide. Even if Aunt Mae can afford to pay someone to clear snow all winter, can the piles really be moved by a human with a shovel? Moved to where exactly?

These types of questions knock around my head while I travel in traffic. And another: If I get flattened out here,

whom do my survivors take it up with? The Aunt Mae rule would appear to indemnify the City. But it's never been tested.

Of course, some wheelchair users simply stay home, under house arrest, until the snow and sludge melts. They shouldn't have to, and I can't. I have a job and a 7-year-old.

I remember some years ago when Boston started installing curb ramps. There were intense neighborhood discussions around the ugly yellow plastic pads, a negotiated brownish-orange agreement, and a lawsuit by the Beacon Hill Neighborhood Association, until they settled on brick-red cast iron pads that didn't alter the historic district's sidewalks.

I think it's time to talk again. Maybe Boston needs a few pieces of specialized snow removal equipment. Maybe it needs to keep the first and last parking spots on every street available for snow mounds. Maybe it needs to better communicate with residents better about their responsibilities.

ADA-mandated curb ramps covered under piles of snow and wheelchairs traveling in traffic are not inevitable natural events. They're about policy.

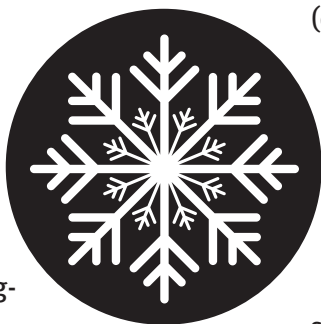
WalkBoston followed Amy around 5 days after a storm. In just 3 blocks, she encountered 6 impassable curb cuts. Watch the video: walkboston.org/clearcurbcuts

BY ANDRAE DOWNES / NEWTON CITY COUNCILOR

Newton's snow evolution

In the winter of 2007, it looked like Newton could never get its sidewalks clear, much less find a way forward. We were faced with dozens of snowed-in corners and complaints of impassable walks; hundreds of letters to local lawmakers and the papers; and of course, thousands of snowflakes, thawing, freezing, and making safe passage impossible.

Newton briefly had a snow clearance ordinance in the early 1990s, but it was quickly rescinded after a bad winter, fears of shoveling-related heart attacks, and a flurry of voter rage at having to shovel.



To get momentum behind sidewalk clearing and the passage of a new effective snow clearance ordinance, Newton needed a broad-based coalition of allies. These allies included parent and walker Alicia Bowman (now Councilor), Councilor Vicki Danberg, a committee made up of the Council on Aging, local synagogue leaders, and parent-teacher organizations, and help from WalkBoston.

Our efforts were multi-pronged. We did hours of research, including 11 community surveys conducted by the local League of Women Voters. Liability issues were cleared up (*Papadopoulos v. Target Corp.*). A matrix showing what surrounding communities do gave the then-Board of Aldermen (now a Councilor) an idea of the possibilities. Speakers addressed lawmakers' fears. And sidewalk snow became a mayoral election issue. *continued*

BY WENDY LANDMAN / WALKBOSTON SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR

Digging in on snow

One thing stays true for Massachusetts: It snows. And 11 years after it was written, WalkBoston's report on better sidewalk snow clearance, *Keep It Clear: Recommendations for Sidewalk Snow and Ice Removal in Massachusetts*, remains shockingly relevant (download at walkboston.org/snow). While some cities and towns have adopted a more proactive approach to better clear sidewalks, walking after a snowstorm is still a challenge statewide.

Whether it's from individuals with disabilities or parents who push strollers, each year WalkBoston receives calls and emails from people across the state—especially older adults—asking how we can help improve the conditions of sidewalks, curb ramps, traffic islands and paths.

While we would love to see municipalities take full responsibility for sidewalk clearance, today's budget realities make this an unlikely scenario. However, the actions described below could significantly improve winter walking conditions at a much more modest cost.

- Require municipal sidewalk snow clearance plans that set priorities for both public and private clearance, (municipalities)
- Clear key walking routes—sidewalks and curb ramps—that provide access to transit, schools, public buildings, and senior housing, (municipalities, MassDOT)
- Prioritize enforcement of private sidewalk clearance by zones that reflect walking demand. For example, homeowners in low-density areas with low demand might be exempt from clearing their sidewalks, while businesses in shopping areas with high *continued*

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Registration & info for the below can be found at walkboston.org/events

February 12, 2020 1-5PM

WalkMassachusetts Network 2020

Location TBA in MetroWest area, within a short walk of Framingham/Worcester line.

Tickets: Free with RSVP

March 25, 2020, 5-8PM

WalkBoston's 30th Annual Party & Golden Shoe Awards

Boston Society of Architects
Fort Point Room / Atlantic Wharf
290 Congress Street, Boston

5:00 Eat, drink, schmooze

6:00 Program and Golden Shoes

Keynote Speaker: Mark Fenton

Tickets: \$30

includes beer, wine and food.

snow quotes

Well, I know now. I know a little more how much a simple thing like a snowfall can mean to a person.

— Sylvia Plath
(born in Jamaica Plain)

Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look what they can do when they stick together.

— Vista M. Kelly

A lot of people like snow. I find it to be an unnecessary freezing of water.

— Carl Reiner

When it snows, you have two choices: shovel or make snow angels.

— Unknown

Digging in continued

- demand would be ticketed promptly if they fail to shovel. (municipalities)
- Develop engineering design improvements for curb ramps, intersections and raised crosswalks that specifically address the need to reduce slush and run-off pooling at the base of curb ramps. (MassDOT)
- Establish protocols for snow plow operators to reduce amounts of snow piled up on curb ramps. (MassDOT, municipalities)
- Create and disseminate a well-funded, multi-year public campaign about the importance of sidewalk snow clearance to the safety, health and economic strength of Massachusetts. (WalkBoston with MassDOT, Mass Department of Public Health/MDPH, and Executive Office of Elder Affairs/EOEA)
- Develop guidance and legal mechanisms to help create a robust set of volunteer and paid programs to recruit snow shoveling assistance for people who cannot do this work themselves. (MassDOT, DPH, EOEA, municipalities)

Massachusetts sits in a climate zone that is especially slushy—with many freeze and thaw days that make winter walking conditions particularly difficult. Better sidewalk snow clearance is a critical component of Governor Baker's commitment to be an Age-Friendly state, to Boston's GoBoston 2030 transportation plans, and to the quality of life and economic development goals of every community in the state. Together, let's take action to keep our sidewalks clear this winter.



There's no business like snow business!

1.20 SNOW

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mission

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

thank you!

RACEWALKERS

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Newton evolution continued

The first ordinance passed in 2011 was a trial, which was extended because it didn't snow that winter. The mayor then hired a star team in the Department of Public Works (DPW) to train the 90+ City contractors who plowed snow often onto the sidewalks in better snow management practices.

To support the success of the trial ordinance, our coalition compiled lists of volunteers to help those who couldn't shovel (with an option for disabled and low-income neighbors). We also put together a list of contractors who included sidewalk clearing with driveway clearing. Meanwhile, we tightened up the ordinances for sidewalk snow removal in business districts, and beefed up police enforcement. Quickly, our village centers became more walkable!

The DPW team tracked compliance and reported to the City Council. After a few years, the trial ordinance became permanent. We then shortened the compliance time for shoveling after a storm and refined the warning system. But there was still no non-compliance fine. A fine was finally passed in 2019. The mayor's office will mail violation warning letters to each non-compliant neighbor to give property owners a chance to find a contractor, if needed, to cover sidewalk clearing.

This winter, if it snows, we will evaluate how Newton's new ordinance—now with teeth—works. **Research and policies are available at walkboston.org/snow.**

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