



CITY OF CONCORD

New Hampshire's Main Street™

REPORT TO MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

Date: October 26, 2023
To: Mayor and City Council
From: Earle M. Chesley, P.E., General Services Director
Subject: Winter Operations Staff Stipend

Recommendation:

Approve the report and set for public hearing to be conducted at the December 11, 2023, City Council meeting to raise and appropriate \$385,000 for the purpose of a winter stipend for City staff directly related to the performance of winter operations.

Background:

Under the direction of the General Services Department, General Services staff, including voluntary personnel from the Parks and Recreation Department and Community Development Department, perform winter operations on city-maintained public streets, sidewalks, and airport to maintain effective movement of people, goods and services with minimal interruption while concurrently providing continued emergency services during winter weather.

During the past six months, General Services has experienced a critical reduction of staffing levels due to employee resignations. This staffing reduction is in addition to typical employee staffing level attrition due to retirement.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, the department would lose about 0.6 employees per month due to resignations. Similar to many other employers, the Department experienced an uptick in employee erosion with the introduction and presence of COVID-19; however, that rate had dropped back to about 0.8 employees per month and was returning to historic levels.

Most recently, during the past six months ending this October, the Department has lost twelve employees through resignation. The attrition rate due to resignations is more than three-fold

over historical rates. Of critical concern is that three-quarters of these vacant positions are needed to perform winter operations. Within the Department's Highway and Utilities Division, which is responsible for executing the City's Winter Operations Policy, there are presently eleven vacant positions that require a CDL operator's license.

The impact of this loss has caused General Services to already eliminate the staffing of one of our three leaf collection crews in order to staff two. Bulk fall leaf collection will be delayed in Wards One, Two, Three, and Five. At present staffing levels, bulk leaf collection in these areas may not start until the first week of December.

For the past five years, Concord has experienced plowable accumulations of snowfall on the following dates:

December 11, 2022	1.5 inches
December 25, 2021	2.1 inches
December 5, 2020	4.5 inches
December 1, 2019	5.2 inches
November 16, 2018	5.4 inches

The General Services Winter Operations Policy is published on the city's website at www.concordnh.gov/winteroperations. The policy establishes the priority of operations, staffing and equipment levels, street and sidewalk plow routes.

In summary, General Services directs a continuous snow removal operation utilizing two shifts of personnel that work up to sixteen-hour shifts before, during, and after a winter event. During the main shift, while there is winter precipitation, twenty-four pieces of equipment are deployed on city streets, and three pieces of equipment are deployed to maintain sidewalks in our downtown area. Immediately following this shift, the department staffs a swing shift where twenty pieces of equipment are deployed on City streets. Following the storm, up to eight sidewalk plows are deployed to address city sidewalks beyond the downtown area on a priority basis, with the first priority directed at the designated safe walk-to-school routes for the community's elementary schools. Typically, General Services will haul accumulated snow from the downtown area about seven nights per winter. This work is not performed on either Friday or Saturday night in order not to disrupt late evening business activity. Additionally, as snow volumes accumulate and impinge upon narrow streets, General Services will remove snow.

Presently, General Services has eleven vacant full-time positions and seven part-time positions related to snow removal operations and is actively recruiting to fill these positions.

The shortfall of staffing for winter operations is not unique to Concord. Other communities and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation continue to experience this chronic problem. In an attempt to mitigate the shortfall, the NH Department of Transportation is providing \$5,000 for a second year.

Discussion:

In order to mitigate the rapid and acute loss of critical staff associated with winter operations for city streets, sidewalks, and the airport, General Services strongly recommends a winter three

hundred dollars (\$300) stipend paid weekly to City full-time staff available and related to winter operations for city streets, sidewalks, and airport. Generally, these stipends will be provided to staff with commercial driver's licenses addressing winter operations. Further, General Services recommends a winter weekly stipend of one hundred fifty dollars (\$150) for staff supporting the performance of winter operations (wingers)

The Director, Deputy Director, and Division Heads are not eligible for the stipend.

This stipend is critical to remain competitive, retain current employees, and attract new staff that is necessary to provide the level of service Concord has historically enjoyed for the past twenty years. Should staffing levels not return, significant delays will occur in implementing the City's Winter Operations Policy, adversely impacting vehicular traffic during and immediately after the storm, including pedestrian traffic to our community's elementary schools. Continued erosion of staffing levels due to the resignation of employees seeking other jobs will further reduce the Department's ability to carry out the City's Winter Operations Policy.

The total cost of the stipends is \$385,000. Unassigned fund balance may be used as a funding source.

Cc Brian LeBrun, Deputy City Manager/Finance

Jennifer Johnston, Director of Human Resources and Labor Relations