

Fairmont adds Snow Emergency Routes

by Troy Nemmers, PE

"Weather" we like it or not, winter is coming.

To improve efficiency and provide better driving surfaces for travel during icy and snowy conditions, the City has added additional snow emergency routes.



New signage is planned along all existing and additional routes to alert residents about the parking ban during a snow emergency, when two (2) or more inches of snowfall has occurred. During a snow emergency, parking on snow emergency routes will be prohibited for 24-hours or until the street is cleared curb to curb, whichever occurs first. Violators may be ticketed and towed.



With the changing seasons, businesses and residents should keep in mind the regulations regarding snow and ice removal. The following ordinances apply to City streets, public sidewalks and snow removal by private entities.

- A snow emergency shall be declared automatically upon the falling of two (2) or more inches of snow within the city. The city council, city administrator, public works director or director of public safety shall have the authority to declare a snow emergency at any other time they determine the weather conditions require a snow emergency declaration.
- Parking is prohibited on all snow emergency routes for twenty-four (24) hours after the imposition of a snow emergency, or until the snow emergency route has been cleared of snow from curb to curb, whichever event occurs first.
- Vehicles parked in violation of snow emergency regulations will be subject to towing and ticketing.
- On all non-snow emergency routes, any motor vehicle left parked in one (1) place for more than twenty-four (24) hours during the snow emergency will be considered to be in violation of a snow emergency regulation.
- It is unlawful to park a vehicle on Downtown Plaza from Blue Earth Avenue to 4th Street between the hours of 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. from November 1st through March 31st.
- All snow and ice remaining on public sidewalks is a public nuisance and shall be removed by the owner or tenant of the abutting private property within twenty-four (24) hours after such snow or ice has stopped falling.
- The City may remove from all public sidewalks adjacent to private property, beginning twenty-four (24) hours after snow or ice has stopped falling, all snow and ice thereon. The City shall keep a record of the cost of such removal and the property owner or tenant will be charged a \$25 administrative fee plus the actual cost of the snow removal. Each additional time the city must remove snow or ice from the same property, the owner or tenant will be charged an additional \$10 administrative fee plus the actual cost of the snow or ice removal.
- Except for the actions of the road authorities and utility workers, it is unlawful to deposit snow or ice in the street.

For the snow removal policy and map of the snow emergency routes, visit www.fairmont.org/streets

Tips for Residents

Shovel Smart

- Do not shovel, plow or blow snow into the street. In addition to being illegal, blowing snow in the street makes it difficult to see roadways. Snow should be blown onto your property, piled or removed off site.
- Clear snow around fire hydrants.
- Keep mailboxes clear to ensure postal delivery.

- If it's likely streets will be plowed on collection day, place refuse/recycling containers 5 feet back in the driveway to prevent waste from being scattered.



Play it Safe

- Talk with children about snow and snow plow safety. Children should stay away from snow piled at the curb and not build forts in those piles.
- Be careful when driving in icy and snowy conditions. Keep a safe distance back when following a snow plow and use caution when passing plowing equipment.

City Exploring Franchise Fee to Fund Street Improvements

by Paul Hoye

On July 16, 2018, the City Council held a goal setting/budgeting work session to begin the 2019 budget process. The most debated topic was the overall disrepair of city streets. In the 2018 budget, the Council approved a \$50,000 increase to the City's levy for addressing street improvements and repairs. Additionally, the Council approved increasing the city's levy \$50,000 each year over the next 5 years. After 5 years, this will add an additional \$250,000 per year for street repairs. The Council also approved hiring an additional full-time Street Department staff member, with the intent of having a street department crew designated to street maintenance year-round.

Currently, the City is funding the street improvement program by issuing special assessment bonds and levying a tax to pay debt service. When issuing bonds, the City is required to comply with MN Stat 429, which can make it difficult to finance projects according to schedule and can be a lengthy controversial process. MN Stat 429 also requires the City to assess 20% of the amount of the bond issue, which can be challenging when certain properties are exempt from assessments and legally we cannot assess more than what the value of the improvements are to individual properties. Another disadvantage of issuing bonds to fund our street improvements is the exorbitant amount of bond issuance costs and interest paid on these bonds. Since 2012, the City has gone through 5 bond issues and will pay over \$2.8 million in interest and issuance costs over the life of those bonds. If the City could develop a different funding source, that money could be allocated towards improving street conditions.

A funding option the City is exploring is implementing a franchise fee. MN Stat 216B.36 allows municipalities to charge a utility fee to both electric and gas companies for operating in the right a way. We have begun exploring this option with MN Energy. Should the City Council move forward with imposing a franchise fee, public hearings will be held to allow for community input.

Benefits of charging a franchise fee verses assessing street improvements include: 1) *The elimination of interest and bond issuance costs we currently pay on our special assessment bonds.* 2) *Eliminating all future assessments for street improvements.* Instead, of some citizens getting hit with a several thousand dollar assessment, all MN Energy customers within city limits would pay a small monthly fee toward street maintenance. 3) *Allocating more funding toward street improvements.* Imposing a small monthly street maintenance fee to each household would generate more funding in comparison to only assessing street improvements to the impacted property owners. 4) *The City would have more control over the timing of our improvement projects.* Imposing a franchise fee provides predictable funding which allows the City to be efficient with planning and bidding at opportune times. 5) *A lower tax rate.* Due to retiring assessment bonds, the City could lower our debt service levy, which would ultimately lower the City's tax rate. Additionally, the City would have lower debt ratios as outlined in our new debt policy.

The City Council will discuss funding for city streets during the budget hearing on December 10th at 6:00 PM in the City Council Chambers.



City Council

Meets 2nd & 4th Mondays at 5:30 pm
City Hall Council Chambers

Debbie Foster	235-5826	Mayor
Tom Hawkins	238-3678	Council Member At-Large
Bruce Peters	238-4507	Ward 1
Ruth Cyphers	236-2710	Ward 2
Jim Zarling	238-9303	Ward 3
Wayne Hasek	235-3974	Ward 4

City Hall

Office hours Monday-Friday, 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
100 Downtown Plaza, Fairmont

Mike Humpal	238-3936	City Administrator
Elizabeth Bloomquist	238-3939	City Attorney
Paul Hoye	238-3934	Finance Director
Patty Monsen	238-3935	City Clerk
Troy Nemmers	238-3942	Public Works Director/City Engineer
Michael Hunter	238-3178	Police Chief