Navigating an Unprecedented Winter: What Yo Need to Know About Snow Clearing in Edmonton

If it feels like this winter has been especially challenging, you're not imagining it.



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In December 2025, Edmonton recorded **416% more precipitation than our 30-year average** - making it the **sixth snowiest December on record**.

Much of that snow started on Christmas Eve and continued into the first days of 20 creating difficult conditions for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists alike.

I know people are frustrated, I've heard it in the phone calls, emails, social media a conversations while I've been out in the community. At the same time, I've also hea the appreciation for the City of Edmonton crews who have been out 24/7 to keep Edmonton moving.

Snow Clearing Takes Time - Especially at This Scale

Clearing this amount of snow, safely, takes time. Our crews are working around the clock, but with this many snow events over such a short period, priorities must be consistently be reset to address the most urgent safety concerns first.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to visit the City's **Winter Travel** website. Th you can:

- Review **snow clearing service levels** and timelines
- See a **live map** showing where snow removal equipment is operating
- Sign up for parking ban notifications by email or text.

The City of Edmonton's 4-Phase Snow Clearing Approach

The City of Edmonton uses a **4 phase approach** based on safety, traffic volume and accessibility:

Priority one: Main freeways, bus routes, downtown, business districts, and hills. Typically cleared within 24 hours of the end of a snowfall event.

Priority two: Remaining freeways, arterial roadways, business districts, collector roadways, and Transit Park and Ride access roads. Can take up to 5 days following t end of a snowfall event.

Priority three: Industrial areas and rural roadways

Priority four: Residential roadways and alleys/back lanes

Parking Bans

When a snowfall is significant, a Phase 1 Parking Ban may be called to allow crews clear on major roads safely and efficiently. This doesn't happen after every snowfall but based on the volume of snow we've received already this year, several Phase 1 Parking Bans have already been called this winter season.

> **Moving your vehicle during a parking ban is one of the important ways residents can support our crews and keep everyone safe.**

Residential Road Clearing

When it comes to residential roads, the service standard is different from our Priori 1 and 2 roads. Here's how:

- Residential roads are maintained to a 5cm snowpack
- Once a residential blading cycle is initiated, it must be completed within 14 da
- Residential blading cycles are only called when there is enough snow to mainta a 5cm snowpack.

In the last few winters, this has usually meant one residential blading per year. In fa there has been at least one winter in the last few years where no residential blading

was initiated due to the lack of snow.

This year is different.

The sheer volume of snow we have received has been significant and has made loca roads especially challenging. I drive a smaller vehicle and have had a couple close c getting stuck. I've heard from many residents who have been stuck themselves - or who've helped to push someone else free.

Why Aren't Crews Blading Residential Roads Yet?

I have a lot of people asking me, "When will City crews start blading local roads?"

It's a great question and I want to share a bit more detail about how these decisions are made.

Every time there's a new snowfall event, everything resets. Even if crews were work on Priority 2 roads, a fresh snowfall means they must return to Priority 1 roads first because those roads:

- Carry the highest traffic volume
- Include transit routes
- Pose serious safety risks if left untreated (such as steep hills).

Windrow Removal

Right now, crews are focussed on windrow removal on major roads. With this much snow, windrows in some areas are now taking up entire traffic lanes, creating significant safety hazards.

A question that some people have is, "*Why not stop the other work and move to residen blading*?" It's a great question and one that City staff think about carefully.

If City staff shift to snow removal on residential roads, those large windrows on bus roads will stay. With children returning to school on Monday, and traffic increasing windrows that are blocking entire lanes, that is a major safety concern.

I understand the challenge faced by continuing to focus on windrow removal when local roads are in rough shape. This is not an easy trade-off. I know no one wants to have to choose between removal of windrows on main roads or blading local roads - but that is the situation we are facing with the volume of snow we have recently experienced.

Snow Clearing Budget: What does it cost?

The City of Edmonton's snow clearing budget has increased each year since 2023 and that includes another increase in 2026. Is it enough? That depends on each person's desired service level.

The current budget is approximately $67 million, which is enough to meet existing service levels - but not to provide full snow removal.

Some cities remove snow entirely, hauling it instead of blading it. That approach comes with a MUCH higher cost because snow piles can no longer be placed in local green spaces like what used to happen prior to the mid-2000s.

A few years ago the City of Edmonton received a high-level estimate for what it would cost to haul snow from residential roads:

- $1-2 million for an average residential blading
- Approximately $20 million for full snow removal from our residential roads.

That would be a substantial increase on top of our existing budget of approximately $67 million.

We must also recognize that Edmonton has grown significantly over the last 20 yea adding thousands of kilometres of roads, while our snow clearing resources haven't grown at the same pace.

Looking Ahead: Budget Conversations for 2027-2030.

As we enter 2026, that means the work is underway to create our next 4-year budge (2027-2030).

During the campaign, I committed to setting a new foundation for our budget and working with you to set the expectations and priorities. It's important to have hone conversations about:

- What it costs to run a city of our size
- What service levels Edmontonians expect
- How we balance expectations with concerns about rising property taxes.

Even with the increases in our snow removal budget each of the last 4 years, I belie we need to consider further investment in snow and ice control.

We need to invest and catch up with our city's growth. We've added thousands of kilometres of roads but our budget hasn't kept up. While I never want to overreact t the excessive snow we've seen in December, I think we could still benefit from grea service even in an average year.

The question we must answer together: are we willing to pay for that increased service? It's an important question Edmontonians need to answer.

Finding the balance between taxes and service levels is never easy and that's why I want to make sure Council is out across the city in 2026 to help inform our budget deliberations later this year.

A Word of Thanks

I would like to thank everyone who has been doing their part by clearing side walks moving vehicles during parking bans and being good neighbours during the past fe weeks. We have seen a LOT of snow and I know that it adds to everyone's load, especially during the holiday season.

I want to also thank our City workers who have been working 24/7 including on Christmas and New Year's to tackle this large amount of snow. It's not easy to give time with family and friends but Edmontonians greatly appreciate your service eacl and every day.

There's still far more that I could add in a blog about winter roads in Edmonton bu hope this information helps provide more context about our specific situation this winter. Please check out the links above and if you have follow up questions, let me know and I can try to cover those in future blogs and/or videos

Stay safe and thank you for your patience,

Andrew Knack

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Allison Dragsten Jan 3

Liked by Andrew Knack

Personally, I would pay more for better snow clearing. I appreciate that there are limitations of th current budget, however, I do feel that the City should be able to allocate funds for an increased clearing budget as we are seeing a rather large percentage increase in our property taxes. We sh be able to both clear main roads and residential streets simultaneously. Your transparency and explanation is appreciated but even with a grasp of how things work, I and many other Edmonto would still like to see an improvement made to how the city clears snow.

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Jason Beaverbones Jan 3

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Bliz blam his ham. Be better prepared next year. Expect the unexpected. More equipment, more Have an emergency plan for private workers to supplement, have a reserve of temp workers. Be t to change mid winter like right now. Less talk more action.

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