

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

Promoting honest, efficient, and fully accountable government

REVIEW OF SNOW REMOVAL AT CITY RECREATION FACILITIES

VIOLATIONS & CITATIONS

2010



City Controller
ALAN BUTKOVITZ



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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ALAN BUTKOVITZ
City Controller

Aug. 25, 2010

Susan Slawson, Commissioner
Recreation Department
1515 Arch Street, 10th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Joan Schlotterbeck, Commissioner
Department of Public Property
790 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear Commissioners Slawson and Schlotterbeck:

The Office of the City Controller has performed a review of snow removal activities at the City's recreation facilities after the February 2010 snowstorm. This review was conducted after residents contacted the Controller's Office through the hotline to complain about the inadequate snow removal from the sidewalks of City recreation areas.

Along with our on-site inspections, we examined snow removal citations given to property owners during this same time period. The findings of both visual inspections and review of snow removal citations are provided in this report.

We anticipate our findings and recommendation will provide management and staff with insight into future planning and action plans during similar weather conditions.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Butkovitz".

Alan Butkovitz
City Controller

cc: Honorable Michael A. Nutter, Mayor
Michael DiBerardinis, Recreation Department Commissioner
Richard Negrin, Managing Director
Rob Dubow, Finance Director
Paula Weiss, Office of Administrative Review



**SNOW REMOVAL
AT
CITY RECREATION FACILITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Why the Controller’s Office Conducted the Review

A review of snow removal at various City of Philadelphia recreational sites was prompted by complaints made to the Controller’s Office hotline. The calls included complaints that snow was not removed from sidewalks of City recreation areas, yet residents in those same areas were receiving citations from the City for not shoveling their snow.

Philadelphia Code, Section 10-720, requires sidewalks to be clear of snow and ice within six hours of when the snow has stopped falling. Those who violate this code are subject to a \$50 fine.

What the Controller’s Office Found

Six days after the February 10, 2010 snowstorm, the Controller’s Office surveyed a sample of 42 recreation locations in three of the nine recreational districts to substantiate complaints received and to determine the extent of the lack of snow removal of sidewalks and entrances to the City’s recreational areas.

Of the 42 recreational areas surveyed, the Controller’s findings include:

- five locations were clear of snow: 37 were in violation of the City Code, causing an unsafe passage for pedestrians.
- 1,643 violation notices worth \$82,150 were given to property owners for violating the same policy that the City was not complying with during this time period.
- 32% of sampled violations were given to residents over the age of 60.

What the Controller’s Office Recommends

The Controller’s Office recommends that the departments or organizations responsible for City-controlled property have adequate sidewalk snow removal plans, processes, and procedures to ensure their facilities meet Philadelphia Code requirements to clear sidewalks of snow and ice within six hours of when the snow has ceased to fall.

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SNOW REMOVAL AT CITY RECREATION FACILITIES

Background

A review of snow removal at various City of Philadelphia recreational sites was prompted by complaints made to the Controller's Office hotline. The calls included complaints that snow was not removed from sidewalks of City recreation areas, yet residents in those same areas were receiving citations from the City for not shoveling their snow.

Discussion

The Philadelphia Code, Section 10-720, requires snow and ice removal from sidewalks and states that,

“the owner, agent and tenants of any building or premises shall clear a path of no less than 30 inches in width on all sidewalks adjacent to the building or premises within six hours after snow has ceased to fall. The path shall be thoroughly cleared of snow and ice so that it can be safely traveled by pedestrians. Snow or ice removed from sidewalks, driveways, or other areas shall not be placed or piled in the street posing danger to the community and others who may use the sidewalks/streets. Any person who violates the snow removal requirements set by the Code will be subject to a fine.”

The fine for violation of Section 10-720 is \$50 and additional late fees are applied to those who do not make timely payments.

The City has nine recreational districts and each district has areas of high pedestrian traffic surrounding some of its recreational areas. Recreation facilities are home to many senior citizen programs and activities during the day. These facilities also provide safe places for activities during non-school hours for children to learn and grow.

Due to complaints received by the Controller's Office that many recreational area sidewalks were not cleared of snow and ice, on February 16, 2010, we sent out teams to substantiate the complaints, a full six days after the February 10, 2010 snowstorm. We selected three separate recreational districts to survey; District 5 (north), District 6 (north and east), and District 7 (south).



Hank Gather Jr. Recreation Center, 25th & Diamond

Findings

Survey of Locations

Controller's staff surveyed 41 recreation locations from three recreational districts plus one other location due to a specific complaint, totaling 42 site inspections. Our survey revealed that five locations were properly cleared of snow and 37 locations were in violation of the City Code, causing an unsafe passage for pedestrians. The location descriptions are included in the attached matrix.

Review of Issued Resident Violations

In the six days following the February 10, 2010 snowstorm, the City issued a total of 1,643 violation notices for failure to properly remove snow, with a fine value of \$82,150.¹ The total fine value of \$50 does not include \$25 late fees for residents who fail to pay their violation on time.

In the 1,643 instances where violation notices were issued, these notices were given before the City removed snow from all the sidewalks of its own properties. Failure to remove the snow and ice makes it difficult for pedestrians to safely travel to important or necessary destinations. We observed many pedestrians struggling to walk on snow covered sidewalks, or resorting to walking in the street where they risked being hit by on-coming traffic.

The Controller's Office sampled 50 of 1,643, or 3%, of the tickets issued. Of the sampled amount, 34 of the tickets could be identified to a person's age. The following is a breakdown of these findings:

- Average age: 52
- Residents/owners over 60 (32%)
- Residents/owners over 65 (24%)
- The majority of tickets were issued three days and five days after the storm

What the Controller's Office Recommends

The Controller's Office recommends that the departments or organizations responsible for City controlled property, particularly the Recreation Department, have adequate sidewalk snow removal plans, processes, and procedures to ensure their facilities meet Philadelphia Code requirements to clear sidewalks of snow and ice within 6 hours of when the snow has ceased to fall.

The following pages include a matrix of locations visited and pictures of some of the sites surveyed where sidewalks were not cleared of snow.

¹ The total amount of collections is based on the City actively trying to collect the funds associated with these violations. It is also important to note that Code Violation Notices can be appealed, and the amount for the ticket issued could be reduced by a Hearing Examiner.

Matrix.

	Name of Location	Address	Clear	Violated City Code
DISTRICT 5	Amos Playground	16 th & Berks St.	X	
	Athletic Rec. Center	26 th & Master St.		X
	Cecil B. Moore Rec. Center	22 nd & Huntingdon St.	X	
	Clemente Playground & Rec. Center	18 th & Wallace St.		X
	Duckrey Playground	15 th & Susquehanna Ave.		X
	Fotteral Square Park	1100 block of York & Cumberland		X
	Francisville Playground & Rec. Center	Francis St. & Shirley St.		X
	Hank Gather Jr. Rec. Center	25 th & Diamond St.		X
	Mander Playground & Rec. Center	33 rd & Diamond St.	X	
	Marie Dendy	10 th & Jefferson St.		X
	Martin L. King Rec. Center	22 nd & Cecil B. Moore Ave.	X	
	Penrose Playground & Rec. Center	12 th & Susquehanna Ave.		X
	Winchester Playground	2332 N. 15 th St.		X
	DISTRICT 6	Black, Coyle, & McBride	2150 E. Huntingdon	
Cruz		6 th & Master		X
Cohocksink Rec. Center		Cedar & Cambria		X
East Poplar Playground		800 N. 8 th St.		X
Fairhill Square		4 th & Lehigh		X
Hart Park		1315 N. 4 th St.		X
Hetzell Playground		Thompson & E. Columbia		X
Konrad Square		Tulip & Dauphin St.		X
McVeigh Rec. Center		D. & Ontario		X
Nelson Playground		3 rd & Cumberland		X
Rambler Playground		G. & Atlantic		X
Scanlon Rec. Center		J. & Tioga		X
Shissler Rec. Center		Blair & Montgomery		X
Tip-Top Playground		Front & Allen St.		X
Towey	Howard & Berks		X	
DISTRICT 7	Anderson, Marian Rec. Center	17 th & Fitzwater		X
	Barry Playground	18 th & Bigler		X
	Burke Playground	2 nd & Jackson	X	
	Capitolo Playground	9 th & Federal		X
	Chew Playground	19 th & Washington		X
	Columbus/DiProspero Playground	12 th & Wharton		X
	Dickinson Square	4 th & Tasker		X
	DiSilvestro Playground	15 th & Morris		X
	Gold Star Park	6 th & Wharton		X
	Guerin Playground	16 th & Jackson		X
	Jefferson Square	4 th & Washington		X
	Mifflin Square	Wolf & Ritner		X
	Murphy Rec. Center	4 th & Shunk		X
Gifford Playground – Loesche School	Gifford Ave. & Tomlinson		X	

Pictures of some of the surveyed locations.



Gifford Playground, Gifford Ave and Tomlinson Rd (Shown are school children leaving William H. Loesche Elementary School)



Hank Gather Jr. (Moylan) Recreation Center, 25th & Diamond (District 5)



Francisville Playground & Recreation center, Francis & Shirley (District 5)



Scanlon Recreation Center, J & Tioga (District 6)



Rambler Recreation Center, G & Atlantic (District 6)



Chew, 19th and Washington (District 7)



Jefferson Square, 4th and Washington (District 7)