

DHI General Membership Meeting

February 15, 2023, 8:30 am

The focus of the general membership meeting was on snow/ice removal downtown and related flooding. DHI organized a meeting with the city on this subject at the request of some downtown business owners. The triggering event for some of the business owners was recent flooding of businesses on Last Chance Gulch (LCG) that back up to Jackson St below grade. Others were concerned with snow berms blocking business access downtown during their busiest season.

Snow/Ice Removal and Infrastructure

Transportation Systems Director David Knoepke attended the meeting to discuss the following concerns:

- Communication with the city regarding snow/ice removal
- Immediate operational issues and related flooding
- Long-term infrastructure issues

Business owners described the following issues:

- It is difficult to find anyone to talk to about snow plowing/removal when there is an issue.
- Sometimes plowing occurs on lower priority streets before higher priority.
- Snow berms limit parking and access to businesses. Snow berms accumulated over 6 weeks at the end of 2022.
- The downtown core has the greatest tax revenue density in town.
- Snow berms block drainage of snowmelt, which causes flooding and significant damage.
- The city has not been responsive when storm drains are blocked by plowed snow/ice.
- The flooding and access problems could have been avoided with one snow removal.
- Some property owners aren't doing the required snow removal on their sidewalks.
- There are serious drainage, flooding, and infrastructure problems for businesses/properties between Jackson St and LCG. These are associated with snowmelt from Jackson. There are some big gaps between the street and gutters and huge vaults under the street/sidewalk. Can the city look into the problems specific to this area?

Mr. Knoepke provided the following information regarding snow removal:

- There has been a legacy practice of removing snow from downtown only at night, and that request originated with DHI/BID. (Understand the difference between snow plowing and snow removal. Removal is done only after major snow events, and that is what has been done at night only.)
- Nighttime removal limits the department's ability to remove snow after major snow events, because it limits the window for possible removal and requires switching personnel to the night shift, which can happen only on weekends.
- The city has a new snow blower that is much higher capacity than the old one, so snow can be removed more quickly than in the past.
- A better plan for snow removal would allow daytime removal. One idea is to plow snow into windrows in the middle of the street beginning at 4 am, and removing the snow as quickly as

possible, which could extend into morning business hours. Another option would be evening removal.

Mr. Knoepke providing the following on other related matters:

- Call the Street Department if you have snow issues.
- Snowplows may use lower priority streets for travel between high-priority streets. They don't raise their plows when they do that, so some lower priority streets will get plowed in the process. Operators choose their own routes to accomplish removal.
- In areas without boulevards, they can't plow snow onto the sidewalks, so they do plow it to the shoulder.
- The city responds to complaints about property owners not removing snow, but doesn't patrol looking for that. Call or use the My Helena app to report.
- If business/property owners want guaranteed snow removal after certain triggering snow events, they need a contract with someone to do it.
- Jackson St is a particular problem because it isn't crowned – it slopes downward east to west.
- His department can look at the Jackson St issues, but he has to serve the whole city consistently. He will talk to Public Works about the storm drains.

Results:

- Jordan asked for any objections to allowing daytime snow removal and heard none.
- General thinking of attendees was that yes, removing snow during business hours will impact business access, but an access problem for a couple hours is a lot better than allowing the berms to remain and solidify.
- John/Jordan agreed to send a letter to D. Knoepke relaxing the requirement that snow be removed at night. (We sent the letter the following day.)
- D. Knoepke will draft a plan for daytime snow removal and present it to DHI/BID.
- Jordan/John will follow up with the city regarding the Jackson St issues, and D. Knoepke will discuss with Public Works.

Regular Business

- D. Knoepke explained that there is a new online application system for event permits, and it was being presented to the commission that night. It allows for duplication of existing events, reducing redundant paperwork. It may have the feature of getting event approval for a 5+ year period.
- AshLy Tubbs of Prickly Pear Land Trust announced the Don't Fence Me In trail run will be Saturday, May 13. Last year they had 1100 participants from 80 ZIP codes. They are looking for sponsorships, partnerships, and volunteers. They are trying to make this a 2-day event and they are looking for businesses to partner, especially for engagement on Friday.
- Randi of Blue Cross Blue Shield announced the Governor's Cup will be June 10. Packet pickup will be Friday night at the Doubletree Hilton. They are also looking for business partners – discounts, events, a band walk, etc. Also need inserts for swag bags.

- Alive at 5: Extending the season with two block parties to open/close the season. The first one will be at the Independent building.
- Gold Rush Days, May 5-7: Connected to Vigilante Days but not just for students.
- Soapbox Derby, September 15-16: Trying for a full weekend with sidewalk sales up and down the Gulch. There will be a Kid Fest at Pioneer Park on 9/16.