

AGENDA ITEM #16  
March 9, 2010  
**Briefing**

**MEMORANDUM**

March 5, 2010

TO: County Council

FROM: <sup>Go</sup> Glenn Orlin, Deputy Council Staff Director  
Minna Davidson, Legislative Analyst *MKD*

SUBJECT: **Briefing**—blizzard of 2010 recap

The County's Public Emergency law (Code Section 2-17(b)(7)) requires that the Executive provide to the Council two reports after any event requiring activation of the EOC:

1. Within 30 days – the Executive or his designee must inform the Council of the facts of the event; any casualties, damages, or costs, and the long term implications of the event.
2. Within 60 days – the Executive or his designee must give the Council an update of the initial briefing and a list of lessons learned.

Cris Voss of the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (OEHMS) will present the 30-day report.

In addition, the Council President has solicited questions from Councilmembers to be addressed to representatives of the County Government, State Highway Administration, and several utilities regarding their response and lessons learned from the blizzard. The following individuals are anticipated to attend this worksession:

Montgomery County Department of Transportation: Arthur Holmes, Director; Al Roshdieh, Deputy Director; Keith Compton, Chief, Division of Highway Services.

Maryland State Highway Administration: Augustine Rebish, Deputy District Engineer, District 3; Vernon Stinnett, Jr., Assistant District Engineer-Maintenance, District 3.

Potomac Electric Power Company: Thomas Graham, Regional President; Stan Wisniewski, Vice President for Operations; Kim Watson, Vice President, Maryland Affairs

Comcast: Josh Bokee, Director, Government Affairs, Montgomery & Frederick Counties

Verizon: Miriam Wiesel and Andre Sanders, Directors of Operations; Tara Potter, Government Affairs

RCN: Richard Beville, Vice President/General Manager—DC markets

## **I. Questions for DOT and SHA**

### **A. Plowing operations**

1. Many constituents called/emailed because they were upset that there was little to no coordination with PEPCO. They were told by PEPCO representatives who tried to enter neighborhoods with unplowed streets that they could not restore their power until DOT plowed their streets. How does DOT coordinate with other agencies to plow streets where the restoration of power is needed?
2. For roads that are not identified on the GPS system, what steps are taken to include all roads on plow routes?
3. Rather than plowing arterials and primary roads to bare pavement, why not clear enough snow to make these roads passable—even if still snow-covered—so the plows could move into the neighborhoods sooner?
4. There were reports that contractors focused on one neighborhood over and over instead of moving on to do areas which had not been touched even once. Is this the direction that has been to contractors?
5. Each agency (DOT, MCPS, Parks, etc.) is responsible for clearing snow from its own assets. But should there not be contingency plans for blizzards, during which all agencies direct their plows to the main roads, then the minor roads, then to parking lots?
6. What is the cul-de-sac policy? Are cul-de-sacs merely the last streets in a neighborhood to be plowed before the plows leave the neighborhood, or are cul-de-sacs in all neighborhoods covered during a second pass once all other neighborhood streets are cleared?
7. Many cul-de-sacs and smaller roads were not plowed by the contractors up to a week after the rest of their neighborhood had been plowed. Why have many contractors left neighborhoods without completing the job?
8. Snow clearing around transit centers and the most heavily used bus stops need to receive a higher priority. How can they be incorporated into the plow routes?
9. There was confusion among residents over which roadways were County-maintained. What can be done to clearly demarcate what streets (or sections of street) are not County maintained (e.g., a webpage, signage on the street)?
10. In cases where there are houses on only one side of the street, why couldn't plow drivers alter the angle of their blade to push the snow to the side without houses, so as not to block driveways?

## **B. Snow clearance from sidewalks**

1. What is the policy and what are the instructions to snow removal personnel regarding moving snow onto sidewalks?
2. What is a resident's responsibility to clear a sidewalk when a plow pushes snow and ice back onto it? Does the resident have another 24 hours to clear the plowed snow and ice?
3. Are there provisions to waive enforcement of the sidewalk clearance law if the burden is out of the ordinary, as it was during the blizzard?
4. Many residents are willing to step forward and help shovel the driveways and sidewalks of those residents unable to do so. However, we were notified that, contrary to information on the County's website, the County's Volunteer Center would not be coordinating volunteers, as it had done in previous years. Residents informed us that when they contacted the Volunteer Center, they were told to contact local fire departments or CASA (who charges for services) for help clearing sidewalks and walkways. Is this the new policy?

## **C. Public information**

1. The map on the County's website was filled in a single color at the beginning, showing that all areas were under progress, which was not helpful at all to residents. Can the map be updated in real time to show which arterials and primaries—and which neighborhoods—have been cleared? Can SHA coordinate with the County on this?
2. Staffers were fielding calls and were directing people to contact their Councilmembers. Who is responsible for providing MC311 staff with information for constituents?
3. Many constituents called regarding the service they received from MC311. In some instances, they were told that their service request for snow removal had been completed, when their streets had not been plowed. Residents were confused about this practice. Please explain how 311 ties into plowing operations.

## **D. Aftermath**

1. After the storms there have been many reports of downed trees, signs, demolished curbs, and other debris pushed onto front yards. How and when will SHA and DOT address this cleanup? How should residents report this, and to whom?
2. Has SHA and DOT calculated the damage from the storm in terms of infrastructure—particularly, pavement, curbs, signs, and trees—that have to be replaced? Are DOT and SHA preparing budget requests to fix the damaged infrastructure?
3. What is the estimate of FEMA aid to the State and County, respectively, for the storm-related costs, plus cleanup?

## **II. Questions for the utilities**

1. What was the weather-related factor that had the most devastating impact on loss of power or cable service: ice, tree and branch loss, or wind?
2. Describe the collaboration that took place in the metropolitan DC area in terms of sharing equipment and staffing. Was there a collaborative strategy across the board in terms of addressing outages and using resources?
3. Some neighborhoods took issue with the fact that entire neighborhoods did not have power restored at the same time. How does PEPCO determine the order in which streets in a neighborhood have power restored? Do PEPCO technicians bring neighborhood maps or communicate with neighbors when they come to restore power in neighborhoods? Please explain the triage used in addressing utility outages; in other words, how was the prioritization of repairs determined?
4. Some neighbors were concerned with PEPCO customer service representatives who told customers to vacate their homes during the last major storm. They say that they were told to vacate their homes because no one could tell them when their power might be restored, but then PEPCO also called their homes a few days later to check to see if their power was restored. If they vacated their homes as directed, how could anyone tell them whether or not their power was restored?
5. What were the number and percentage of homes without power or cable service in Montgomery County compared to Frederick, Howard, and Prince George's Counties? If there were major discrepancies in the percentage of outages among the counties, what is the explanation?
6. Please describe what outages were addressed, if any, when roads were impassable?