

Policy Briefing Summary

City Council



Regarding:	Snow and Ice Mobility Management Program (FY27)
Staff Contact(s):	Steven Hicks, Director of Public Works, Riaan Anthony, Director of Parks & Recreation, Garland Williams, Director of Transit
Presenter:	Steven Hicks, Director of Public Works
Date of Proposed Action:	October 5, 2026

Issue

Presentation of the City of Charlottesville, Virginia's ("City"), 2026–2027 Snow and Ice Management Program ("Program") and operational improvements designed to provide a more coordinated, responsive, and effective winter weather response, while maintaining mobility across all modes of transportation.

Background / Rule

The Program guides winter weather operations across multiple City Departments and City Schools. The Program coordinates how personnel, equipment, and resources are deployed to maintain mobility and restore access throughout the community during winter weather events.

The Snow Operations Team is responsible for coordinating winter operations across approximately 165 centerline miles of roadway, 31 miles of Safe Routes to School sidewalk segments, 8.17 miles of prioritized bike lanes, 18 miles of City property sidewalk segments, 20 municipal parking lots, 10 school parking lots, 16 Parks and Recreation parking lots, the Downtown Pedestrian Mall, designated transit and School bus stops, the City-owned facility at 2000 Holiday Drive, and other critical public facilities. The City also coordinates enforcement of the sidewalk clearing ordinance. Snow removal priorities are based on traffic volume and access to emergency routes, public transportation, schools, and other critical destinations.

The City's Snow Operations Team includes Charlottesville Area Transit, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Utilities. More than 165 personnel are formally assigned to snow operations, with 127 directly involved in snow removal activities. The City has access to 76 pieces of vehicles and equipment for snow response, including plow trucks, skid steers, power brooms, backhoes, loaders, and tractors.

Following the 2025–2026 winter season, City Staff evaluated the City's response to identify what worked well, and where improvements were needed. The 2026–2027 Program incorporates those lessons with a focus on more effective snow clearing, earlier access to neighborhoods, mobility for all modes of transportation, improved street operation oversight, stronger customer service, and coordinated use of Citywide resources.

Analysis

Mobility and Priority Routes

A major emphasis this winter is improving how resources move through the City during a storm. Primary and auxiliary routes will continue to receive the first operational attention because they provide critical access for emergency responders, transit, schools, and the highest volumes of traffic.

The updated Program defines a roadway as “functionally open” when full emergency vehicle access and at least 1 full travel lane are available. Once primary routes reach that condition, available resources can begin transitioning into secondary and residential streets, while appropriate coverage of the priority network continues. The goal is to establish critical access, verify conditions, and move resources into neighborhoods sooner, rather than continuing to concentrate resources on routes that are already passable.

The Program also establishes clearer expectations for plowing. Operators are expected to clear available pavement rather than simply following previously established wheel paths and to minimize impacts from plowed snow on sidewalks, ADA ramps, bike lanes, crosswalks, transit stops, and other areas needed for mobility.

Mobility for all Modes of Transportation

The 2026–2027 Program places greater emphasis on mobility across the entire transportation system, not simply vehicle travel lanes. Restoring mobility means providing access for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, students, emergency responders, businesses, and others who depend on the transportation network.

Safe Routes to School sidewalk segments, designated School bus stops, School parking areas, and roadway conditions affecting school transportation are incorporated into operational planning. Snow clearing at designated School bus stops will include space around the stop for students to queue, access crossing areas, and safely reach bus loading locations. Street plowing operations will also account for the roadway frontage serving these stops. Conditions will be reviewed in coordination with City Schools as School opening and delay decisions are evaluated, with the goal of restoring safe access and minimizing disruptions to students and families.

Prioritized bike lane corridors are formally incorporated into winter operations. Street plowing operations will be adjusted to address these corridors, and for severe weather events a designated plow unit may be assigned to circulate and clear designated bike lanes.

The Downtown Pedestrian Mall and designated priority pedestrian areas will be pretreated as conditions warrant to reduce the bonding of snow and ice and improve subsequent clearing. The Downtown Mall remains an identified clearing priority during storm response and recovery.

The City’s winter operations responsibilities also now include maintaining access to the City-owned facility at 2000 Holiday Drive. Snow and ice response will account for roadway and facility access at this location, including access for residents, Staff, service providers, emergency responders, and others using the facility. Holiday Drive will be incorporated into winter operational planning along with other critical City facilities and community destinations.

The City’s available equipment, including plows, skid steers, power brooms, loaders, backhoes, and tractors, provides flexibility to address different transportation areas and snow conditions. Resources can be reassigned across the Snow Operations Team based on conditions and operational priorities.

Collectively, these efforts are intended to restore mobility to neighborhoods, Schools, businesses, transit, pedestrian areas, bicycle facilities, School bus stops, critical City facilities, and other community destinations as safely and efficiently as weather conditions and available resources allow.

Improved Coordination and Responsiveness

The updated Program establishes one unified City operations plan and centralized coordination of winter operations. Personnel and equipment can be deployed when and where needed, while City Departments continue maintaining their critical core responsibilities.

The Program establishes 4 operational phases: Pre-Event Preparation, Initial Push for Emergency Access, System Opening for Neighborhood Access, and Clean-up, Recovery, and

Optimization. These phases provide clearer objectives during each stage of a storm and help guide when resources can transition from maintaining critical routes to restoring broader community access.

A formal Street Monitor Program, combined with GIS and Automatic Vehicle Location technology, will provide better information about roadway conditions, equipment locations, and route progress. Field Monitors will provide timely feedback from designated areas to Snow Team Leaders and the Operations Center, helping City Staff verify conditions and determine where available resources should be deployed next.

The Public Works Operations Center will serve as the central coordination point during significant events. The Operations Center will support customer service, monitor vehicle and equipment deployment, track route progress, document operational issues, and assist with overall coordination. Additional administrative personnel may be assigned to assist with telephone calls, MyCville requests, documentation, and customer inquiries, allowing field personnel to remain focused on snow removal while improving responsiveness to the community.

Coordination with City Schools incorporates school transportation, Safe Routes to School, School parking areas, and designated School bus stops into operational planning. Emergency Management coordination is also incorporated for significant events requiring an enhanced or regional response.

These improvements are intended to establish critical access, move resources into neighborhoods sooner when conditions allow, improve mobility across all modes of transportation, and provide better information to both operational leadership and the community.

Mobility for All

The FY27 Program places greater emphasis on mobility across the entire transportation system, not simply vehicle travel lanes. The City's winter response recognizes that restoring mobility means providing access for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, students, emergency responders, businesses, and others who depend on the transportation network.

Safe Routes to School sidewalk segments, designated School bus stops, School parking areas, and roadway conditions affecting School transportation are incorporated into operational planning. Clearing at designated School bus stops will include space for students to queue and access crossing and loading areas. These conditions will be reviewed in close coordination with City Schools as School opening and delay decisions are evaluated, with the goal of restoring safe access and minimizing disruptions to students and families.

Prioritized bike lane corridors are also formally incorporated into winter operations. Street plowing operations will be adjusted to address these corridors, and specialized equipment may be deployed where appropriate to improve clearing and reduce the impacts of accumulated or sidecast snow.

The Downtown Pedestrian Mall and other designated priority pedestrian areas will be pretreated as conditions warrant to reduce the bonding of snow and ice and improve subsequent clearing. The Downtown Mall will remain an identified clearing priority during storm response and recovery.

The City has also purchased new specialized snow-removal equipment to improve the ability to clear and relocate accumulated snow from priority transportation areas. This provides an additional option where conventional plowing or sidecasting may reduce usable transportation space or create barriers for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, businesses, and other community members.

Collectively, these efforts are intended to restore access to neighborhoods, Schools, businesses, transit, pedestrian areas, and other community destinations as safely and efficiently as weather conditions and available resources allow.

Improved Coordination and Responsiveness

The updated Program establishes 1 unified City operations plan and a centralized coordination structure. Personnel and equipment can be deployed when and where needed, while City Departments continue maintaining their critical core responsibilities. Coordination with City Schools incorporates School transportation, Safe Routes to School, School parking areas, and designated School bus stops into operational planning. Emergency Management coordination is also incorporated for significant events requiring an enhanced or regional response.

A formal Field Monitor Program, combined with GIS and Automatic Vehicle Location technology, will provide better information about roadway conditions, equipment locations, and route progress. This will help operational leadership verify conditions and determine where available resources should be deployed next.

The Public Works Operations Center will serve as the central coordination point during significant events. Additional administrative personnel may be assigned to assist with telephone calls, MyCville requests, documentation, and customer inquiries, allowing street personnel to remain focused on snow removal while improving responsiveness to the community.

The objective of these improvements is straightforward: establish critical access, clear more usable transportation space, move into neighborhoods sooner when conditions allow, maintain mobility for all users, and provide better information to operational leadership and the community. After-action reviews of significant events will continue to identify lessons learned and opportunities for further improvement.

Financial Impact

The 2026–2027 Program will be implemented primarily through existing Departmental personnel, equipment, materials, and operating resources. Actual expenditures will vary based on the number, severity, and duration of winter weather events and may include overtime, treatment materials, contractor assistance, snow hauling, and other event-related costs.

Recommendation

City Staff recommends that City Council receive the presentation and update on the 2026–2027 Program. The updated Program reflects lessons learned from previous winter operations and emphasizes a coordinated approach to restoring mobility across all modes of transportation, including roadways, neighborhoods, pedestrian routes, bicycle facilities, transit, School transportation, designated School bus stops, and critical City facilities.

Recommended Motion (if Applicable)

No motion is required. This item is presented to City Council for information and discussion only.

Attachments

1. Snow Mobility Plan Council 10 5 2026