

Director commends Public Works action during heavy snow

More than 100 tons of road salt used

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript

Last week, the city was hit by the third big snowstorm of the 2010 winter season, and once again the Department of Public Works was called on to clear the streets.

According to Arlene Kemp, the department's director, her employees did their best to keep up with the Feb. 25-26 storm. Luckily, she said, they were up to the task considering the limited equipment at their disposal.

"The Public Works Department has performed wonderfully, especially given our manpower and equipment constraints," said Kemp in a statement Tuesday. The staff is "consistently challenged with aging equipment, snowplows and salt trucks."

Kemp said her department had 15 vehicles available when the snowfall began. By the time most of the work was finished, only six vehicles were functioning.

Kemp said department employees recorded approximately 650 man-hours during a five-day period which included salting, removal and cleanup. During that period, said Kemp, the city used approximately 110 tons of road salt.

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. praised the "strong snow removal effort" during the storm.

"I want to commend all of the dedicated city employees who worked so hard over the weekend to remove snow from our streets. The resources of our city were pushed to the limit by the record storm, but our workers came through.

"On Friday night, I became concerned when I saw that too many streets remained clogged with snow and impassible," Hawkins continued. "So I spent Friday night until dawn on our streets monitoring snow removal and following the plows."

Although that kind of vigilance and diligence is not technically part of his job as mayor, Hawkins said he believed the urgency of the situation warranted it. He said he also believed it was necessary to call in more personnel by enlisting other municipal employees in the snow safety and removal effort.

"To accelerate the job of getting the snow off our streets, I had the Fire Department attach plows to SUVs and participate in the snow removal effort," said Hawkins. "I asked the Public Works director and top Public Works officials to ride with the plows to supervise the snow removal, and I directed our Orange vehicles to replot Main Street to improve the snow clearance done by the county.

"Main Street is a county road and as such the county is normally responsible for plowing and maintaining it," Hawkins continued. "And I asked our police to go door-to-door on streets where cars blocked our plows and ask owners to move their vehicles."

Kemp added snow-clearing activities can be more difficult in Orange than in neighboring municipalities. Not only does the city have some cul-de-sacs and narrow roadways, primarily along the southern border with South Orange, but Orange permits overnight parking. This is why police had to ask residents to move their vehicles.

Hawkins said he had nothing but the highest praise and compliments for the job done by the Public Works and other employees.

Hawkins said Kemp had the foresight nearly two years ago to have a plan in place for this winter. During a 2009 City

Council meet ing, Kemp was asked to justify her request for a funding increase for road salt. She explained her vision for the department and the services it provides was dramatically differ ent from her predecessors.

“When I was here years ago the budget for salt was \$50,000. The understanding was there were some streets that didn’t need to be salt ed,” said Kemp at the time. “My philosophy is all the streets should be salted regardless of what part of town they’re in.”