

decision by paying a fee, Padilla continued, "What the mayor officials can't lie under oath or else they will be charged with centers around cost.

Mayor: City Council hindering snow cleanup

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

As the city braced for another winter storm, and in light of complaints about unplowed streets in Orange, Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. took City Council members to task for what he said was their failure to privatize the city's snow-cleanup service.

Hawkins said if council members had awarded a \$55,000 contract to The Shauger Group of East Orange during two previous meetings, he believed it would have guaranteed Orange the manpower and equipment to plow the streets after snowfalls.

Hawkins said the council would have been able to do something that would have provided immediate savings and physical help for the city and help improve life for everyone in Orange in an emergency.

When the first major snowstorm arrived Dec. 26, Hawkins said he was forced to exercise what he said was his executive power as the city's emergency management coordinator to unilaterally hire the company after acting Gov. Stephen Sweeney had declared a state of emergency. Hawkins said he would not hesitate to make that action again.

"The continuing failure of the City Council to approve a private contract for snow removal is hindering the ability of Orange to clear our streets during this winter's massive storms," said Hawkins. "The council was informed on several occasions that a private snow-removal contract is needed even without the layoff of Public Works employees, who are more costly to the city."

Nine employees from the Public Works Department were among the 52 city employees laid off on Jan. 11.



Photo By Barbara Kokkalis

While many areas of Orange were adequately cleared of snow after last week's storm, streets in the Valley section appeared to have been little-touched.

Although there were several questions from the gallery during the council's Jan. 18 meeting, Hawkins said he believed council members should know the answers better because they are "on the inside" and should know the process of awarding a service contract to an outside vendor.

"Our Public Works Department advertised and bid a contract for snow plowing so we could be prepared for this winter's big storms,"

Hawkins said. "Had the council approved the contract, we would have been able to provide better, faster snow removal."

No resolution regarding a possible contract was listed on the agenda for council's meeting, which was scheduled for Tuesday night.

Councilman Elroy Corbitt claimed the council's concern was the lack of transparency and inclusion on the part of Hawkins and his administration. He said the council

has repeatedly asked the mayor for a cost-benefit analysis so they could compare the expense of outsourcing to continuing to do it in-house.

Almost two months and two failed votes later, said Corbitt, neither Hawkins nor anyone else in his administration have given members the information they sought.

"It's clear now that the mayor would rather play the blame game than seriously conduct the city's

business," said Corbitt. "I have personally requested the information, but I still have yet to receive it."

"Right now, we're at a stalemate where it seems like none of the city's important business that needs to get done is being done," Corbitt continued. "It's going to stay that way until the mayor realizes that we are all in this together and we need to work together to solve all of our problems and resolve these pressing issues."