

Council again rejects snow-removal pact

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

Snow once again took center stage at the City Council meeting as Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. attempted to have the governing body award a contract for snow removal even though it had previously rejected his proposal.

The council voted 6-1 on Jan. 18 against a resolution that would have awarded a \$50,000 contract to The Shauger Group of East Orange. The only member to vote for the resolution was South Ward Councilman Edward Marable.

Before the vote, discussion centered on the resolution's presentation for a second time. The council rejected Hawkins' initial request during its Dec. 21 meeting.

"I thought you voted the Shauger contract resolution down at the last meeting," said resident Gloria Stewart. "So why is it back on the agenda tonight? I'll tell you why: it's because if you paid me \$250 an hour to shovel snow, I would do it too."

When more than two feet fell Dec. 26 on northeastern New Jersey, Hawkins said he exercised his right as mayor and emergency management coordinator to appoint Shauger to help clear the streets after Acting Gov. Stephen Sweeney



Photo By Barbara Kokkalis

A pedestrian walks slowly on a snowpacked sidewalk Saturday outside the Central Playground that appeared not to have been cleared before a storm earlier this month.

declared a statewide emergency. It could not be determined how much the city spent for the private work.

Some of the council members expressed concern about the contract after the Hawkins Administra-

tion announced nine workers in the Public Works Department would be laid off. They had been released

by the time that the council met on January 18.

"When you lay off people, there is a premium that you have to pay for their unemployment benefits despite any savings you might get from no longer having to pay them," said Councilwoman Donna K. Williams. "If it snows, we will be paying for the laid-off employees and The Shauger Group, too. "The reason I voted against privatizing the snow cleanup and removal the first time was because I wanted a cost comparison to see if it would have been cheaper and more cost-effective to bring back or keep some of the existing employees at that time for rates like \$12 to \$15 an hour instead of contracting this out to a private vendor."

Williams claimed that despite repeated requests for the information from Business Administrator John Mason and Public Works Director Arlene Kemp, she never received it. Marable said he also believed more research into the costs and benefits of privatization should have been conducted, but added he was concerned that since the layoffs have occurred, if a contract for the snow removal is not in place, it would leave the city vulnerable during the next storm.