

Lee District Comments for Snow Summit

After a string of sunny, 50 degree plus days, it's hard to remember that a month ago we were staring down mountains of snow not seen in more than a century.

These storms and their aftermath have given us insight into what happens in an emergency and what it means to be prepared. We had a powerful illustration of government performing its primary function—keeping us safe and able to move around. We saw citizens working together in their neighborhoods, looking after their neighbors, and lending a hand with a shovel or snow blower. We saw the private sector pitch in and generously offer housing, food, and equipment to our public safety and facilities personnel.

The Snow Summit will assess what worked—and what didn't—at the state—Virginia Department of Transportation—and County level. The lessons we learn will be invaluable not only for the next snow storm, but for any emergency be it natural or man-made.

County citizens were in constant contact with us during the storms, as well as during the lengthy post storm clean up period. My own office has received hundreds of emails and phone calls.

In the immediate aftermath of the storms, the key concerns were:

- Lack of attention to dangerous intersections and hilly areas
- Which streets were plowed and why some residential streets appeared to get multiple plow passes while others saw none;
- Problems reaching VDOT when its phone number was overwhelmed
- Walls of snow plowed onto driveways, sidewalks, and lawns
- Multiple calls and emails reporting the same streets needing plowing or sanding with no action taken

Forty-eight hours into the clean-up period, we added new concerns in addition to the continuing issues.

- Fire hydrants were buried and residents were asked to help dig them out. Many residents wanted to help but had no way of knowing hydrant locations.
- Snow dumped on sidewalks and driveways could not be removed by snow blowers or shovels.
- Coordination between VDOT and the Fairfax County Public Schools broke down when the schools asked residents to help shovel sidewalks and bus stops adjacent to schools—and VDOT contractors came through and again dumped heaps of hardened snow on the cleared walkways.

We are still assessing the damage caused by these storms. Some of the issues we're dealing with at this time include:

- Property damage
- Downed trees and brush
- Damaged storm drains
- Potholes

On the County side, we need to better coordinate our resources. We saw parks and fields plowed early on while other county facilities and schools struggled to find enough equipment and manpower to clear their sidewalks and parking lots. We need to determine if the County Executive has the authority to prioritize the use of resources. It simply makes no sense to plow the entrance to a golf course—that cannot possibly be used—while more critical facilities are wanting.