

Snow Removal FAQs

1. Why are some roads plowed by VDOT and some by the HOA?

The HOA owns and maintains some roads (75 to be exact) within Broadlands, but not all. The ones the HOA does not own belong to the county and are plowed by VDOT. On these public roads, taxes pay for VDOT to plow, so residents living on public roads need to contact VDOT directly if they feel they are not receiving adequate service. Residents living on private HOA owned streets pay an additional assessment to the HOA to fund private road maintenance, including snow and ice services. Residents on VDOT streets do not pay the HOA for private road maintenance. The HOA cannot plow VDOT roads – the HOA would be liable if we damaged the road, hit a car, or created a hazard.

2. Why can't VDOT plow the HOA owned road?

The HOA would gladly turn all of the private roads over to them. Unfortunately, the county has very specific requirements for roads – such as minimum width. VDOT will not accept responsibility for roads that do not meet their requirements. The HOA does not choose which roads it owns. This is determined when the developer submits the plan to the county - long before construction begins.

3. Why are some streets plowed sooner than others?

The crews are assigned maps by their leader. They work on their assigned streets until they are done. With 75 private streets in Broadlands, some roads will be treated first and some will be done last because the plows cannot be on every street at the same time. The crews normally address the main roads first and then work into the secondary roads. You might see a plow drive past your street without stopping. They may be assigned somewhere else, there may be a vehicle blocking access, too many vehicles parked in the way to get the equipment safely in or out, or there may be too much snow for their equipment to handle. With blizzard-type storms, snow drifts present additional challenges - previously cleared roads can become snow-covered again, pulling crews back for additional passes. Whatever the reason, crews will be back to clear your road as quickly and as safely as possible.

4. Why don't the plows clear the road down to bare pavement?

Vehicles driving on snow compact it down, making it more difficult for the plow blade to clear the surface to the pavement – one reason the government, media, and HOA encourage residents to stay home and off the streets during inclement weather. The HOA does not generally use chemicals in subdivisions. Residents should expect streets to have some compacted snow and ice for a few days - until temperatures allow for melting. Crews will treat certain areas with ice-melt - some hills and intersections, curved roadways, etc. where additional traction is needed to allow safe passage. But thaw/freeze cycles may cause these areas to become covered again. Also, please keep in mind that high winds may cause drifting in some areas - a street may have been plowed only to later be covered again by blowing snow. It can also be difficult for plow blades to scrape down to black pavement, depending on the current conditions (how dry/wet the snow is, how fast it is coming down, how hard the wind is blowing, etc.)

5. Why don't the plows clear the entire width of the street, from curb to curb?

Plows are often a misunderstood piece of equipment. If you've ever driven a full sized pickup on a crowded street like many of the ones in our community, which can be a challenge on its own, consider what it's like to add a plow blade sticking 4 feet out in front of your vehicle. Even a "small" plow truck can be in excess of 22' long. Operating a large vehicle, manipulating a plow blade from side to side and up and down, and frequently shifting gears is pretty challenging.

Plow blades can push snow off to the side, but they cannot pick it up. When significant accumulation occurs, the drivers will do everything possible to clear the widest lanes, but they may not be curb to curb. Bear in mind that these trucks can slide on ice and snow covered roads too, so plow drivers exercise extreme caution near parked vehicles, causing owners to have to shovel more to get vehicles out to the road. Please park your vehicles off the roads and off to the sides of parking lots whenever possible. Abandoned vehicles can also add to the issue.

The contractor widened the roads as much as reasonably possible, but in some of the densely populated areas, even days later, there was nowhere to push the snow. Additionally, if the snow mounds had been pushed again, it would have led to blocked driveways yet again. Thankfully, the area received some warm and sunny days in the two weeks following the storm, which created opportune conditions for snow melt.

6. *Will there be a Special Assessment to pay for snow services as we had in the past?*

The HOA will need to wait until the winter season is over and all invoices have been reviewed to determine if there is enough funding budgeted for snow removal this year. This includes snow services, turf and tree/shrub repairs, and other damages that may have occurred due to the incredible amount of snow. The Board will review the budget and expenditures and will do everything reasonable to avoid a special assessment – while maintaining their fiduciary responsibility to the Association and the residents.

7. *Why can't we use reserves to pay the snow removal bills?*

The reserve funds are required to be held for future repairs and replacements of community property and cannot be used for snow removal. Those funds are on hold in reserve to pay for major expenses such as resurfacing HOA roads, re-roofing the community center or replacing pool machinery, not operating expenses.

8. *Why are the fees for HOA owned streets so much higher than for residents on VDOT streets when we seem to get comparable services? How much of the monthly assessment goes to snow plowing?*

For 2016, the budget for snow removal for townhomes is \$50,236. That's \$41.48 per townhome per year (or \$3.46 per month for each of the 1,211 townhomes in the Association). The budget for snow removal for Single Family homes on private streets (SFPS) is \$27,613. That's \$74.43 per SFPS home per year (or \$3.97 per month for each of the 371 SFPS in the Association). The balance of the monthly assessment is for private road maintenance, for the repair and repaving of those roads, aprons, curb and gutter, and sidewalks.

9. *Why don't we budget more for snow removal and increase our service?*

It's impossible to predict the weather months (or even days) in advance, and snow is a huge variable from year to year. When formulating the budget, the Board uses an average cost of snow removal for past years. Inflated amounts can lead to unnecessary increases in assessments, or a surplus of income in the budget. The Association is required to maintain a balanced budget. A surplus of funds could create a tax liability for the Association - an unnecessary cost to residents. The Board makes every effort to keep assessments stable while keeping services as high as possible.

10. *How does our snow contract work?*

The Association's contract is "time and materials" and is at a fair and reasonable cost for these services in our area. Each snow event is different and unpredictable, but we are billed only for the time the contractor worked. The Association is fortunate to have a contractor that is solely dedicated to Broadlands and willing to work around the clock. Many associations have crews that are assigned to multiple properties, and their community may not be a priority for that contractor. If you've ever driven down Demott Drive, you've probably seen some of the equipment stored in the Summerbrooke pool parking lot. All of this equipment is stored on site all winter and is dedicated to Broadlands. Additional equipment that is utilized by the contractor for other jobs year round is brought for snow events in order to fully support our needs.

11. How do we know we are receiving the best and most qualified plowing service?

Winter storm Jonas was an unprecedented event for our area, dropping 3' of snow in 36 hours. Contractors throughout the area could not keep up with the sheer volume of snow. Many of the crews in Loudoun were sidelined for a few hours on Saturday due to whiteout conditions - for the safety of the crews and property. Contractors throughout the county did the best they could under the circumstances. Our contractor had passable roads within 3 days of the end of the storm - moving thousands of tons of snow during that time. Many communities in our area were not as fortunate and did not see even one plow until Tuesday. Every company in the area was dealing with the situation and few would have been able to handle a community of this size any better than SSIC. They provided Broadlands with ten plow trucks, three tractors, a bobcat, front end loader, and a crew of 32 people dedicated to clearing our roads and sidewalks as quickly as possible and work continued for 11 days.

12. Do crews take breaks? How long do they work between breaks?

Many of the drivers worked long hours - often 24 to 36 hours at a time without the opportunity to go home and sleep in a real bed. The goal during a storm of this magnitude was for each driver to have a 6 hour break every 24 hours. Sometimes they needed breaks more often in order to nap, eat, use the restroom, or touch base with loved ones. They were very thankful for the hot coffee, cookies and appreciative comments from residents. It's understandable and recommended that they would need to take a break once in a while in order to reenergize and safely continue their work. They worked day and night, driving slippery roads, dodging parked cars and avoiding hazards to clear the roads. All so that emergency responders could reach residents in the event of a life threatening emergency.

13. Can the plows push the snow in such a way as to avoid blocking my driveway?

A plow blade is designed to push snow to the side; it will not pick it up and deposit it elsewhere. As the plow moves along the road, snow is piled up along the side whether that side has a curb, a driveway or a guardrail. In order to clear a lane quickly, the plows will push snow off to the sides. They try to come back after all is said and done and dig out driveways or sidewalks that have been blocked. It can be very frustrating to dig out the driveway only to have the plow leave a new pile. Residents on VDOT roads as well as HOA roads had plows deposit snow in their driveway – some several times. VDOT recommends digging out an area 10 to 15 feet to the right of your driveway (viewed from the street), giving the excess snow a place to go, which may help to minimize the plow pile at the end of your driveway. Obviously this is difficult to do in some of the densely populated areas where driveways are side by side.

14. Was there a fuel shortage during the storm which delayed the plows from operating?

Several Ashburn area gas stations ran out of gasoline and/or diesel early in the storm, so crews went to Leesburg, Chantilly and Sterling for fuel and quickly returned to Broadlands to resume work.

15. Did the state commandeer any of the equipment during the storm for medical emergencies? Will our HOA have to pay for that?

While the HOA would have preferred to have the contractor's full complement of equipment working in Broadlands throughout the storm, the state has the authority to require assistance during a state of emergency and a few times, some of the heavy equipment dedicated to Broadlands was called upon to assist in medical emergencies. The HOA was not billed for these times. Fortunately for those in need, there was equipment to assist with medical emergencies and this didn't significantly disrupt the contractor's operations.

16. Who is responsible for clearing around the fire hydrants?

On HOA owned streets, our contractor marked all of the hydrants using wooden stakes with blue tape on them. This way they could return after the snow subsided and the roads were clear to dig them out to make them accessible for fire trucks. On VDOT streets, it is the residents' responsibility to mark and dig out the hydrants.

17. Where should I put the snow from my driveway/sidewalk/parking space if not in the street?

The HOA and VDOT ask that you do everything possible to avoid shoveling snow into the street as it creates road blocks for your neighbors and adds to the snow volume that the already strained plows have to move out of the way. Try to pile the snow in your yard or find some common area open space (turf, not roadway) to place the snow. The HOA received a number of complaints from residents that their neighbors had shoveled themselves out but placed the snow in such a way that it blocked a road or someone else's access to their vehicle or driveway.

18. When and by whom will the turf damage be repaired? Who will pay for it be fixed?

At the end of the snow season, the association will contract with our landscaping contractor to perform repairs to the turf. Turf damage was unavoidable in many areas due to the sheer amount of snow. Plows did some damage along the streets and tractors digging out sidewalks also did some damage. They tried to avoid it, but in many cases it was simply inevitable.

19. Why does the HOA mark the main roads with the orange snow stakes? Why doesn't it mark the private roads?

A few years ago, the HOA invested in the snow markers in order to identify the edges of the roads on the main roads (Claiborne/Waxpool/Truro Parish/Broadlands Blvd). Although these are VDOT roads, the association has an easement to maintain the turf on the medians and right of ways on these roads. Therefore, the HOA has to pay for turf repairs when they happen. These stakes assist the plows for two reasons. For one thing, the equipment that keeps these main roads clear are larger commercial grade trucks that sit several feet higher off the ground than a regular pickup truck. That makes it that much harder to see the edges of the road. Additionally, when VDOT installed the curb on these roads, they rounded the edges in order to save concrete. This does not define the edge of the road in the same way that a square concrete curb does, and it's much easier for the plows to jump the curb and shave off large sections of turf in doing so. On the HOA roads, the plow equipment is generally smaller so the drivers can see a bit easier. Also, most, if not all of the HOA roads have square curbs, making it slightly harder for the plow to jump the curb and damage the turf. While the HOA has observed turf damage on main roads following the blizzard, the damage is significantly lower than it would be had the stakes been absent and a white snow blanket encompassed the entire road and median/sides.

20. How does the HOA keep residents informed about snow operations during a winter weather event of this magnitude?

The HOA staff made every effort to keep the lines of communication open during the blizzard. It pushed out electronic updates via the Broadlands Blast, front page of the website, and on the forums. Staff also reviewed the office voice mail and returned messages daily, as well as monitored and responded to emails to the info@broadlandshoa.com email and to the General Manager. Additionally, the snow plow crew chief could be contacted directly by residents via a cell phone owned by the association. Although there were times the phone was not answered due to being on another call with another resident or being busy plowing, missed calls were returned during breaks. The voice message system was deactivated because they did not have the ability to safely retrieve and write down messages while operating the equipment.

21. I have a question/complaint/concern. Who can I talk to?

Residents can contact the HOA management at 703-729-9704. In addition, there is the opportunity to provide comments to the Board of Directors at the monthly meeting. The meetings are held at the Clubhouse at 6:00 pm on the second Tuesday of each month.