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How much does winter cleanup cost in your town?

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SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Michael McDonough went to work with his snowblower in Belmont last February.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 11, 2015

Massachusetts cities and towns spent more than \$325 million to clear snow and ice last winter, by far

the highest amount in the past decade, according to a Globe review of state records.

Statewide municipal spending on snow, ice removal by year

Last winter was by far the most expensive of the past decade for Massachusetts cities and towns.

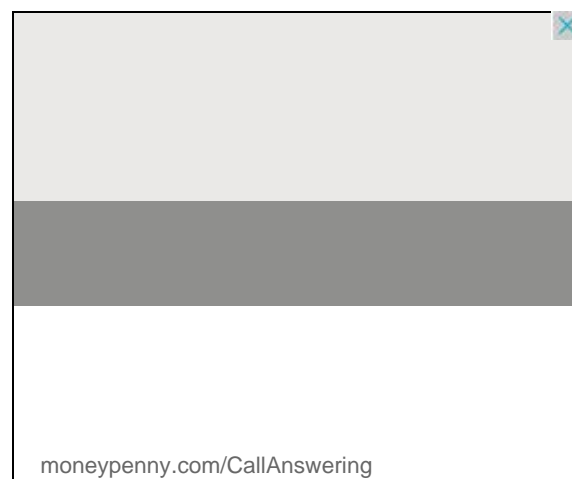
Year	Spending to clear snow, ice	Municipalities reporting figures (out of 351)
2004	99,567,867	345
2005	194,839,361	351
2006	112,519,754	346
2007	75,431,309	326
2008	155,507,659	326
2009	171,140,608	332
2010	126,229,280	339
2011	194,994,856	342
2012	73,541,495	346
2013	170,721,301	349
2014	208,034,178	350
2015	325,863,897	334

SOURCE: Massachusetts Division of Local Services

Snow removal costs per road mile varied, depending on the community. Costs were highest in Boston and surrounding urban communities, which were also some of the hardest hit areas in terms of snowfall last winter.

Officials in those places largely blamed their above-average spending on having to not just treat, plow, and shovel sidewalks and streets, but also to scoop large amounts of snow into trucks and haul it away from densely-built areas.

Somerville spent the most on snow removal per road mile at \$90,588, according to the state's database of snow and ice removal expenditures, which is maintained by the



Massachusetts Division of Local Services.

The city's overall costs totaled \$8 million, greatly exceeding the budget of \$936,000 it set before winter began.

"Simply put, additional spending in Somerville reflects the fact that we did a more thorough job at removing snow from our roads, pathways and school roof tops than any other community in the region despite having some of the most challenging physical infrastructure in the region as well," city spokeswoman Jackie Rossetti said in an email.

"Space is at a premium in Somerville due to our density and narrow streets and we were not willing to risk slowing fire or police response by allowing roads to dangerously narrow," she said.

Even Somerville's "snow farms" ran out of room and the city had to melt some snow, which increased costs, she said.

The Globe's review of snow and ice removal spending only factors in municipal spending — leaving out state- and privately-run snow removal efforts.

The state data used for the analysis does not include every town and city. Seventeen of the state's 351 local governments had not yet reported the data to the state as of Dec. 9.

It also may not include all of the expenses each town and city incurred. Several small towns contacted by the Globe said they had spent higher amounts than what was recorded in the state's database.

Officials in some of those communities said they had used funding outside their normal snow removal budget to cover cost overruns and that spending was not reflected in the state's figures.

The next highest costs per mile statewide were in Quincy (\$73,470 per road mile); Everett (\$55,363); Boston (\$49,474); and Cambridge (\$45,658).

Chris Walker, a spokesman for the Quincy mayor's office, said last winter was the first time he was aware of that the city had to actually haul snow away rather than just plow it.



“With the Red Line being shut down, we really had to get the streets wide enough, as well as the sidewalks,” said Walker. “Quincy is a commuter city, and it’s not just the folks who live here, but tens of thousands of folks who drive through on a daily basis.”

The city also hauled snow from some areas that have historically been flood-prone because of fears that large snow piles would melt too quickly.

Everett spokesman Tom Philbin said officials there had to keep roads wide enough to allow for traffic, residential parking, bus service, and emergency vehicles

“We don’t have the luxury of having any rail in the city. We rely 100 percent on buses, so our streets have to be clean to allow those buses to get through to get people to work,” he said.

He said concerns also arose that pedestrians, particularly children, could be hidden by tall snow piles as they tried to cross streets.

Philbin said the city purchased more than a dozen new pieces of snow removal equipment and hopes to rely more on its own workers in future years instead of private contractors.

“We think we can get those costs down by doing more in-house,” he said.

Bonnie McGilpin, a spokeswoman for Mayor Martin J. Walsh, said in a statement that officials there “are pleased with the hard work of all of the City of Boston employees who last year contributed to snow removal efforts.”

“As the capital city and business hub of Massachusetts, with 6 major hospitals, thousands of school children to transport, the major MBTA bus routes that people from across the region rely on to get to and from work, Boston must do all it can to keep the city’s streets clear during winter weather,” McGilpin said.

Cambridge Public Works Commissioner Owen O’Riordan said that having to haul snow drove up costs, and pointed out that the general cost of labor and services in the Boston area is higher than in other parts of the state.

“Overall, I think we did reasonably well given the conditions that prevailed,” he said.

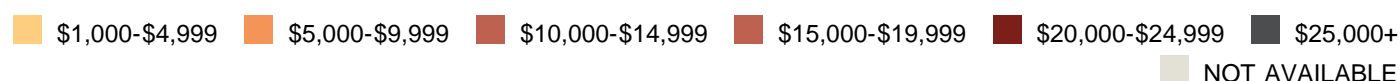
For towns and cities that grappled with unusually high winter-related expenditures this past year, good news arrived this week .

Governor Charlie Baker announced on Dec. 9 a projected \$120 million in federal reimbursements for state, municipal, and non-profit snowstorm costs, which would be the largest single amount of federal disaster aid in the history of Massachusetts.

The cash infusion includes about \$60 million earmarked for city and towns.

Snow, ice removal spending during the winter of 2015

This map shows city and town snow removal spending per mile of municipal road. It does not include spending for state, federal, and private streets. Data is not available for 17 communities because those municipalities have not yet reported figures to the state.



Snow and ice removal spending during the winter of 2015

This table shows city and town snow removal spending per mile of municipal road. It does not include spending for state, federal, and private streets. If the chart shows all zeros it's because those municipalities have not yet reported figures to the state.

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City or town	Spending per road mile	Total snow removal spending	Original budget
Somerville	\$90,588	\$8,015,270	\$936,000
Quincy	\$73,470	\$13,550,784	\$1,760,000
Everett	\$55,363	\$3,110,849	\$375,000
Boston	\$49,474	\$38,453,034	\$18,510,608
Cambridge	\$45,658	\$5,472,572	\$324,755
Waltham	\$43,025	\$4,927,205	\$1,628,000
Gloucester	\$40,287	\$3,526,332	\$650,000
Brookline	\$35,211	\$3,230,279	\$389,091
Rockland	\$32,209	\$1,545,694	\$150,000
Dedham	\$31,716	\$2,638,778	\$650,000
Salem	\$31,132	\$2,754,863	\$432,335
Watertown	\$30,514	\$2,190,926	\$1,165,000
Lawrence	\$29,869	\$3,606,335	\$150,000

Melrose	\$29,836	\$2,131,766	\$500,000
Manchester By The Sea	\$29,413	\$692,087	\$176,000
Newton	\$27,415	\$7,564,862	\$1,000,000
Lynn	\$27,241	\$4,173,659	\$785,162
Braintree	\$26,923	\$2,809,391	\$400,000
Lowell	\$25,995	\$4,855,573	\$1,350,000
Norwood	\$25,952	\$2,778,439	\$530,000

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SOURCES: Massachusetts Division of Local Services

Matt Rocheleau/Globe Staff

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](#).

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