

City of Cambridge Department of Public Works

Katherine F. Watkins, Commissioner

147 Hampshire Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
theworks@cambridgema.gov

Voice: 617 349 4800

TDD: 617 499 9924

January 19, 2023

To: Yi-An Huang
City Manager

From: Katherine Watkins
Commissioner

Re: POR 2022 #312: Feasibility of Conducting Street Cleaning Without Towing

In response to the Council Order requesting a report on the feasibility of eliminating regular towing as part of the street cleaning process, we report the following:

City staff from the Department of Public Works, the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department, and the Police Department have evaluated the existing program, the data associated with tickets and tows, and programs in other communities. The Historical Commission also provided helpful research on the origins of the program.

Based on this information and the desire to maintain an effective street sweeping program, while reducing the impact of being towed on residents, we are recommending a Pilot Program in 2023, which would include not enforcing towing. The Pilot would be evaluated over the 2023 season with a report back to City Council in January 2024 on the effectiveness of the Pilot and any recommendations to improve the Pilot or return to the existing program with towing.

REPORT INCLUDES:

1. History of the program – How and why do we do street sweeping?
2. Data about Ticketing and Towing
3. Pilot 2023 Street Sweeping Program
4. Evaluation of the Pilot

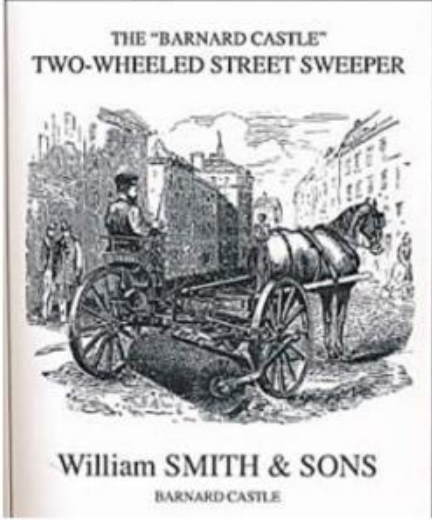


1. HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM – HOW AND WHY DO WE DO STREET SWEEPING?

The street sweeping program goes back to 1885 and is focused on keeping the streets clean, free of leaves, rubbish and debris, and improving the water quality of storm water that is discharged to the Charles River and Alewife Brooke.

Brief History of Street-Cleaning

- ~1885: Annual cleaning of paved streets manually by “section men”
- 1895: First horse-drawn mechanical sweepers purchased
- 1923: First gasoline-powered sweepers purchased
- 1945: Mechanical street sweeping twice a year
- 1970: Tickets were \$5 (\$30 in 2023 \$) for street-cleaning and \$1 (\$6 in 2023 \$) for other tickets
- 1973: Pilot tag-and-tow street-cleaning introduced in Wellington-Harrington
- 1974: City-wide tag-and-tow street-cleaning introduced, April to Nov
- 1998: Street-cleaning extended through December



THE "BARNARD CASTLE"
TWO-WHEELED STREET SWEEPER

William SMITH & SONS
BARNARD CASTLE

The program evolved over the years to include towing. The ticketing alone system was not working. The streets were not able to be properly cleared due to too many vehicles blocking the operation. In 1969 City Manager Jim Sullivan called the condition of the streets “deplorable” and the current towing program went into effect five years later. In 1998, when the City Council discussed the extension of street cleaning to December, Councillor Davis observed that “street cleaning is like eating your vegetables; you may not like it, but it’s good for you.”

While towing improves the effectiveness of street cleaning, the inconvenience of having a vehicle towed can be significant for residents. Other communities have eliminated towing as part of the street cleaning program, with somewhat mixed results. Both **Somerville** and the **Charlestown** neighborhood of Boston do not tow for street cleaning and are reasonably satisfied with the results. Boston increased the tickets associated with street cleaning and both communities provide **twice monthly street sweeping vs. Cambridge’s once a month** program. The **remainder of Boston** continues to have a ticket and tow program. **New York City** has alternating street cleaning for 90-minute periods and does not typically tow. They report that 50% of drivers have stopped moving vehicles, decreasing the effectiveness of the program.

Current Program – How is the program implemented?

The residential street sweeping program sweeps **both sides of every residential street once per month April through December** using mechanical brooms. During the months of April, July, and November regenerative air (vacuum) sweepers are used in addition to the mechanical sweepers. The City also sweeps plazas/arteries/squares (daily), bike lanes, and parking lots. Certain **main streets** with primarily meter parking are swept overnight more frequently than monthly (no towing on overnight routes).

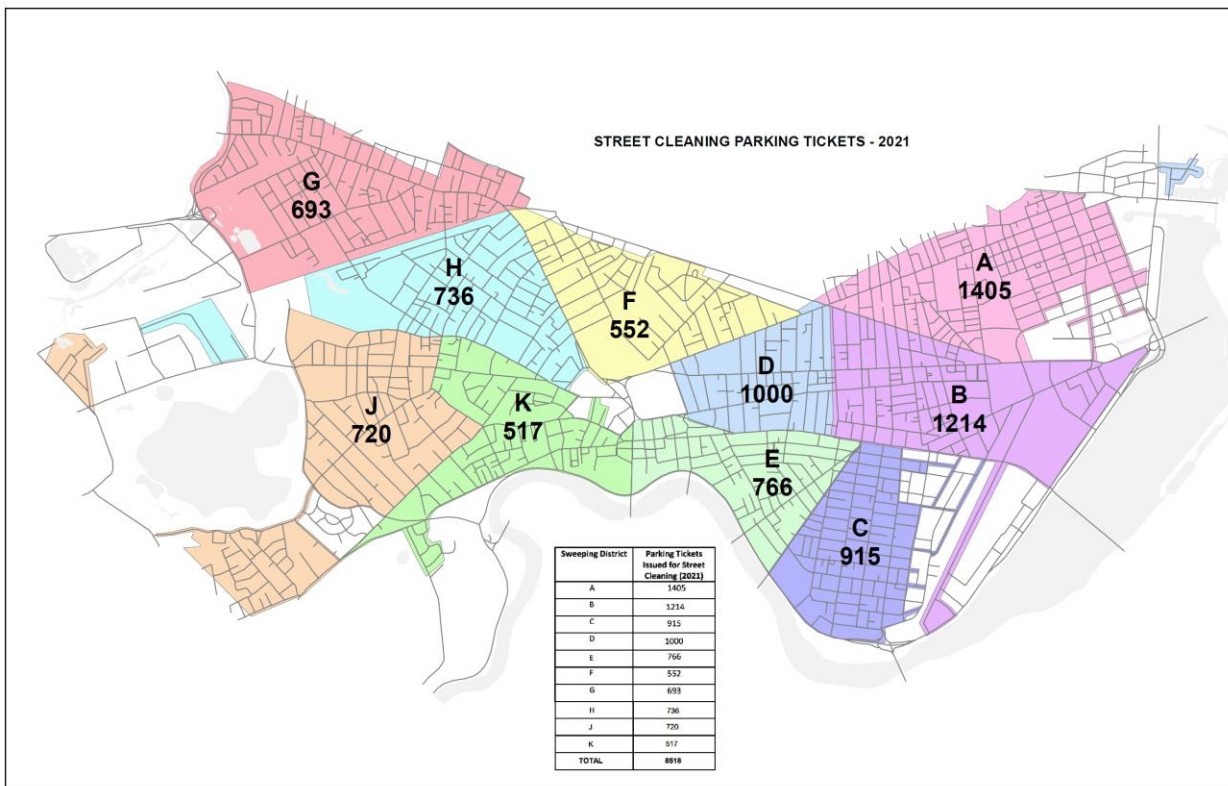
The street sweeping program has benefits for both general **cleanliness and storm water**.

- a) **1,500-2,000 tons of material** (litter, debris, leaves, and sediment) are removed from Cambridge streets during a typical year.
- b) **Accessing the curb** is critical for effective street sweeping, as a USGS street sweeping study in Cambridge found that 57% of solids are within 3ft of the curb and 95% of solids are within 9ft of the curb.
- c) Street sweeping **decreases storm water pollution** by reducing the amount of suspended sediment, nutrients, and other pollutants that reach the Charles River and the Alewife Brooke. For this reason, street sweeping is a requirement of the City's storm water discharge permit with EPA/DEP.
- d) Street sweeping **decreases the amount of phosphorus** that reaches the Charles River and the Alewife Brooke on an annual basis and will be included in our Phosphorus Control Plan as one of the strategies to meet our required target of reducing 700 pounds of Phosphorous per year to the Charles River.
- e) Street sweeping **reduces the risk of localized flooding** by keeping storm drains clear of leaves and debris.
- f) City staff coordinate **catch basin inspections and cleanings** with street cleaning to reduce additional parking disruptions and simplify this maintenance work.

2. DATA ABOUT TICKETING AND TOWING

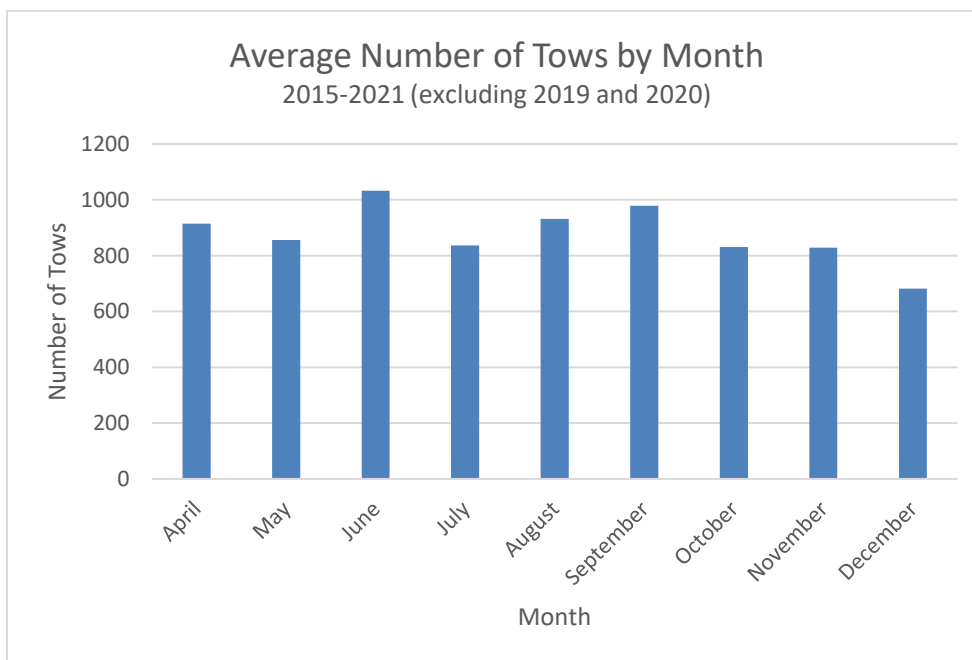
In 2021 8,518 tickets were issued for street cleaning and 7,161 vehicles were towed (an average of 40 vehicles per day of street cleaning). The data for 2022 is similar, but was not complete at the time of this analysis. The number of tickets (8,518) is higher than the number of tows (7,161), because if residents are able to move their vehicle in time, their vehicle will not be towed. Tickets for street cleaning are \$30 and the tow is \$100, with a daily fee of \$40 for vehicles not claimed by 12:01 am the next calendar day after the vehicle has been towed.

Approximately 50% of vehicles towed for street cleaning have a residential parking sticker and 88% of tickets were issued to unique vehicles, which only received one street cleaning ticket in 2021. The number of tickets and tows varies by district, but the highest numbers are seen in East Cambridge and the Port.



Parking Tickets Issued for Street Cleaning Violations in 2021 (8,518 tickets / 7,161 tows)

The average number of vehicles towed for street cleaning per year is 7,890 (2015-2021, excluding 2019 and 2020, which were impacted by COVID).



3. PILOT 2023 STREET SWEEPING PROGRAM

Based on this data and our understanding of the program, staff recommends proceeding with a Pilot program in 2023 that does not tow vehicles for street cleaning. The Pilot would be evaluated to determine if a program without towing can remain effective.

Key Elements of Pilot

- a) **Do not enforce towing**
- b) **Increase street cleaning violation from \$30 to a maximum of \$50 for each violation.**
- c) Modify the street cleaning contract to provide **additional handwork and leaf blowers** to clean around parked vehicles, **particularly in April and November when the leaves and debris are the heaviest.** This will not provide the same level of cleanliness as the current program, but will reduce the negative impacts of vehicles that are not moved. We anticipate that this will increase the existing \$500,000 annual street sweeping contract by approximately 10% to 20%, depending on the number of vehicles that remain on the street.
- d) **Outreach to the community** in March
 - a. Announce the Pilot Program
 - b. Encourage residents to sign up for **automatic notifications** at cambridgema.gov/StreetCleaningReminders. Currently there are 15,000 people signed up.
 - c. **Distribute the street cleaning schedule** (attached at the end of this report). All residents that receive a residential parking permit or visitor pass receive this information, but staff will seek additional means of distributing this information.
 - d. Let residents know that staff will conduct a **survey at the end of 2023** asking for their feedback on the Pilot.

4. EVALUATION OF 2023 PILOT PROGRAM

Throughout 2023 staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the Pilot Program, including a report back to City Council in January 2024 with any recommendations for modifications. The evaluation will include factors such as:

- a) **Volume of material** being collected. Currently 1,500 to 2,00 tons of material (litter, debris, leaves and sediment) are removed in a typical year.
- b) **Number of tickets** issued for street cleaning violations. In 2021, there were 8,518 tickets issues and 7,161 vehicles were towed.
- c) Number of **multiple violations** issued for street cleaning. In 2021 8,518 parking tickets were issued for street cleaning to 7,446 unique vehicles. 88% of vehicles ticketed for street cleaning only received one ticket.
- d) **Street cleanliness**, particularly in areas with higher number of vehicles ticketed for street cleaning.
- e) **Survey of residents** at the end of 2023 asking for feedback on the Pilot.

As part of the evaluation, potential **modifications to the Pilot Program** will be evaluated for 2024 if the level of cleanliness is substantially diminished. Modifications may include:

- a) Increasing outreach efforts.
- b) Increasing the fine associated with the street cleaning violation.
- c) Increasing fines for multiple violations. This would require significant reprogramming or replacement of the handheld system that is used for issuing tickets.
- d) Reinstating towing.

2023 Street Sweeping Schedule

cambridgema.gov/StreetCleaningReminders

2023 Street Cleaning Schedule

*Indicates schedule change to accommodate holidays
617-349-4800 | cambridgema.gov/theworks

DISTRICT	SIDE	DAY	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
A	Odd	1 st Wed	5	3	7	5	2	6	4	1	6
A	Even	1 st Thu	6	4	1	6	3	7	5	2	7
B	Odd	1 st Mon	3	1	5	3	7	29-Aug*	2	6	4
B	Even	1 st Tue	4	2	6	30-Jun*	1	5	3	7	5
C	Odd	1 st Fri	7	5	2	7	4	1	6	3	1
C	Even	2 nd Mon	10	8	12	10	14	11	29-Sep*	13	11
D	Odd	2 nd Tue	11	9	13	11	8	12	10	14	12
D	Even	2 nd Wed	12	10	14	12	9	13	11	8	13
E	Odd	2 nd Thu	13	11	8	13	10	14	12	9	14
E	Even	2 nd Fri	14	12	9	14	11	8	13	30-Oct*	8
F	Odd	3 rd Mon	12-Apr*	15	29-Jun*	17	21	18	16	20	18
F	Even	3 rd Tue	18	16	20	18	15	19	17	21	19
G	Odd	3 rd Wed	19	17	21	19	16	20	18	15	20
G	Even	3 rd Thu	20	18	15	20	17	21	19	16	21
H	Odd	3 rd Fri	21	19	16	21	18	15	20	17	15
H	Even	4 th Mon	24	22	26	24	28	25	23	27	29-Dec*
J	Odd	4 th Tue	25	23	27	25	22	26	24	28	26
J	Even	4 th Wed	26	24	28	26	23	27	25	22	27
K	Odd	4 th Thu	27	25	22	27	24	28	26	29-Nov*	28
K	Even	4 th Fri	28	26	23	28	25	22	27	24	22

Street Cleaning Districts Map

Sign up to get street cleaning reminders at cambridgema.gov/StreetCleaningReminders.

