Crews trash parking-space savers

Policy against laying claim to snow-cleared spots enforced

By Diane Allen, Globe Correspondent, 3/20/2004

Mayor Thomas M. Menino's crackdown on Boston residents who save parking spaces by placing sundry items in the street began yesterday as city sanitation workers picked up orange cones, lawn furniture, and even a barbecue grill from sections of East Boston, South Boston, and Dorchester.

The new policy was instituted at the end of December, when Menino said he was ending the city's time-honored tradition of shovel equity. Those who removed snow around their cars have long considered the spot they cleared to be their own until the snow melted. Menino's order gave shovelers just two days to enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Earlier this week, when the first major storm since Menino announced the change hit Boston, the mayor's office said the clock on the 48-hour grace period would start ticking at the end of the snow emergency. The latest ended Wednesday at 8 a.m., which meant items holding parking spaces were to be collected beginning yesterday morning.

There was some confusion as workers implemented the policy, officials said, because the word did not get out to all the sanitation crews.

Joseph F. Casazza, the city's public works commissioner, said garbage trucks needed to make a second run because of a "communication problem within the agency." He said it took an extra 2 1/2 hours to backtrack through parts of yesterday's routes to make sure all the plastic milk crates and folding chairs were removed.

Casazza did not know how many trucks had to go back out, but said the additional work did not cost the city extra. "The truth of the matter is, there is no question that at the end of the day, the policy was carried out in those areas," he said. "It got straightened out. The work was done."

Although Seth Gitell, the mayor's press secretary, said Thursday that the policy would kick in 48 hours after the end of a snow emergency, the grace period will last a little longer in some places. Casazza said parking-space savers would be picked up in neighborhoods during regular trash days. That means drivers in some areas of Boston will have to wait until next week for spaces to be cleared.

Yesterday, removal of the items was cheered by some.

"Get rid of them," said Anna Mathios, a 64-year-old retired school teacher from East Boston who will have to wait until Wednesday for her East Boston street to be cleared.

"It is a good idea," said Sophia Aravena, 29, as she plucked one of her four daughters from her minivan in East Boston.

Aravena said she hoped the policy would end the competition for parking spots that escalates on snowy winter days. "They're really crazy," she said of people who defy neighbors to take a saved space. "They'll scratch your car or, sometimes, you'll find tires flat."

Near Saratoga Street in East Boston, Lee Sprague, 79, said people abuse the practice of holding spaces. With one neighbor, "when there's a snowflake, she's got a barrel out there," Sprague said. "That's ridiculous. A couple of days, but to keep it out all winter and half into the summer? I can see when there's a lot of snow and you have to shovel. Why let someone who is sitting in there watching television [get your spot]?"

Kevin Brabant, 26, of East Boston, said some people who save spots needed to be reined in.
"I understand shoveling your spot, but some people push it a week and that's wrong," he said. "Old people take all day shoveling, so a couple of days ain't bad."

The sanitation workers who were heaving space-holders into garbage trucks yesterday came across a few items that begged not to be trashed. Some people used their garbage cans to mark spots. And others set out their children's toys and bikes.

Elmo Baldassari, superintendent of sanitation, said crews would use common sense in determining what to discard. Trash cans, he said, would be emptied and put on the sidewalk.

The toys would be left behind, too. "We aren't going to get blamed for taking [them]," Baldassari said.

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