

Mebane City Beat: Being prepared for winter's punch

BY KELLY HUNTER
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS OF ORANGE

When inclement weather strikes, cities must be ready. Preparation doesn't begin when snow starts falling—it happens days in advance, often while forecasts are still changing. Staying ahead of unpredictable weather is a challenge, but it's a vital responsibility for every community. During the winter months, Mebane's greatest weather-related threat comes from snow and ice. That's why Mebane Public Works crews remain on standby, closely monitoring weather patterns and ensuring the proper equipment and resources are in place to protect our streets, infrastructure, and residents.

The City of Mebane begins to prepare for potential winter storm events well before the season arrives. Starting in October, Public Works employees complete equipment training, conduct material inventories, and review the City's winter weather policies and procedures. These early preparations are essential to maintaining a safe, efficient response during and after storm events.

Mebane's winter weather response plan is guided by three primary objectives: to keep traffic and commerce moving, when possible, reduce the risk of accidents, and ensure access and movement for emergency vehicles. These priorities shape how our crews respond and may be adjusted based on current conditions or lessons learned from past storms. Each year, the Public Works Director works closely with supervisors to review and update the Mebane Public Works Storm Event Plan. From the first forecast of inclement weather through the duration of an event, the Public Works Director and Street Maintenance Supervisor remain in constant communication to coordinate response efforts and keep the community moving safely.

During severe weather events, all 26 Mebane Public Works personnel are actively involved in preparing for and managing snow and ice treatment and removal operations. Depending on the severity of the storm, City officials and the Public Works Director will discuss the number of staff needed and whether to implement a rotating twelve-hour shift. Decisions are also made regarding whether road pretreatment is necessary.



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Mebane Public Works crew prepares a vehicle for use as a snow plow in preparation for recent winter precipitation.

Pretreatment is typically evaluated 24 to 48 hours before a winter storm based on weather forecasts, pavement temperatures, and road conditions. If a dry-weather event is forecasted, meaning the storm will start with snowfall, then snow and ice control will begin with the application of brine, salt, and/or sand, followed by plowing when conditions allow. If the event is forecasted to start as rain, crews continue to monitor conditions until temperatures or precipitation warrant treatment.

Mebane Public Works maintains nine vehicles equipped for plowing, two trucks dedicated to brining operations, and two trucks and one tractor for salt application. Depending on street conditions, crews may use brine, rock salt, or sand to treat them. Brining involves applying a mixture of water and salt, typically sodium chloride, to road surfaces to lower the freezing point and prevent ice from forming. The effectiveness of brine as a de-icing agent depends on factors such as solution concentration, road surface temperature, and traffic volume. Because brine helps prevent snow and ice from bonding to pavement, it is both a cost-effective and environmentally responsible approach compared to traditional rock salt alone.

To put the cost into perspective, bulk rock salt—used to create brine and applied directly to roads—currently costs between \$160 and \$190 per ton. One fully loaded Public Works truck can carry approximately \$2,850 worth of salt. Now, how does Mebane determine which streets to treat first and in what order? Several factors, including traffic volume, safety concerns, street usage, and pavement conditions, determine street treatment priorities. Emergency management routes and access to health services receive the highest priority. Crews then move through streets classified as priority one, two, and three. Priority one streets include major north-south and east-west routes, collector streets, and roads serving fire stations. Priority two streets include main through-streets within residential subdivisions. Once these routes are cleared or treated, crews focus on priority three streets, including side streets, dead ends, and cul-de-sacs.

To carry out these treatment operations, Public Works operates a brine mixer and two truck-mounted distribution sprayers. One sprayer is primarily used for general street treatment. A smaller unit is reserved for the downtown area and City facilities such as City Hall, the Mebane Police Department, and Mebane fire stations.

Brining a priority one street can take anywhere from eight to 16 hours, depending on traffic conditions. Obstacles such as parked vehicles can significantly slow treatment and snow removal efforts.

Public Works crews are considered essential personnel and are required to report to duty during inclement weather events—even when the public is being asked to remain home for safety. Crews must travel on hazardous roads while operating heavy equipment, often at reduced speeds and with tire chains in place. Because of the size and weight of this equipment, additional stopping distance and a wide berth are necessary.

While performing dangerous street treatment and clearing operations, crews endure long hours, fatigue, cold temperatures, downed trees, and potential power line hazards. In recognition of these critical responsibilities, public works professionals were officially recognized as first responders in 2003 by President George W. Bush, acknowledging their essential role in emergency management.

Public Works Director Chuck Smith shared, "As first responders, Public Works staff are often the unsung heroes in emergency situations. While traditional first responders like police, fire, and emergency medical services are widely recognized, public works personnel are also vital in restoring services and maintaining infrastructure during crises."

The City of Mebane is grateful for the hardworking men and women of Public Works who help to keep our positively charming community running safely and efficiently. The best way residents can support these crews is by staying home until road conditions improve. Snow and ice significantly increase the risk of accidents, and limiting travel allows crews to work more safely and effectively.

If travel is unavoidable, residents are asked to slow down, provide plenty of space for Public Works vehicles, and use extra caution. If you experience or observe hazardous conditions on roadways, please report them to the 911 call center. The safest roads start with fewer cars and dedicated Public Works crews working to clear them.

Kelly Hunter is the public information officer with the City of Mebane.

Mebane Planning Board recommends duplexes in West End

BY ADAM POWELL
STAFF REPORTER/NEWS OF ORANGE

At its Monday, February 9 meeting, the City of Mebane's Planning Board discussed a request to rezone a 0.30-acre vacant property at the corner of Giles Street and Vance Street in Mebane's West End from R-20 residential to R-8 residential by TRG Capital, LLC. The developer is planning on constructing duplexes on the property.

City of Mebane Planning Director Ashley Ownbey acknowledged that the property in question is seeking a zoning from one residential designation to another, but that the R-8 designation is necessary for the construction of two multi-family duplexes on the property.

"Both of these (R-20 and R-8) are residential districts, but the R-8 zoning district does allow for duplexes, multi-family, and additional residential uses that are not allowed in the R-20 zoning district," Ownbey explained. "You can see on the map that there are a lot of different zoning districts in this general area, predominantly on the block where the property is, is R-20. Zoning across the street is R-8 zoning. There's also some R-12, and some R-15, scattered throughout. And then there's some office and institutional neighborhood business and general business zoning. Some of these zoning districts do not reflect what exists on the ground."

Ownbey further explained that much of the properties zoned R-20 residential in the immediate area of the corner of Giles and Vance Streets does not conform with current zoning standards within the City of Mebane's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

"Many of the R-20 lots do not meet the minimum lot area, minimum lot width of that zoning district - this (property) being one of them," the Planning Director explained. "It does not meet the R-20 zoning district, so it's currently considered a non conforming lot, which simply means it doesn't meet our current standards of the zoning district."

The property, which is located within Mebane's city limits in Alamance County, has access to City utilities, including water and sewer. Currently the property is vacant. There are surrounding properties that are vacant or undeveloped, and also properties with single-family homes and two-family homes, otherwise known as duplexes, in the immediate area, with some of those being constructed right now across the street.

"Our future land use map has this area as suburban neighborhood," Ownbey continued. "This is primarily single-family homes. That was one of the edits that we incorporated with the word 'primarily', and we see the proximity of the downtown future land use map to this area."

The duplexes will be for rent, not for sale. And while the developer couldn't give a specific dollar

figure in relation to future rents, market analysis indicates a range somewhere between \$1,500 and \$1,795 a month.

The Planning Board considered concerns about parking, traffic, and neighborhood character. TRG Capital assured high-quality construc-

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