



February 10, 2011

To: Robert W. Healy  
City Manager

FROM: Lisa Peterson   
Public Works Commissioner

SUBJECT: Awaiting Report responses relative to snow issues

I submit the following responses in relation to the Transportation, Traffic and Parking Committee hearing to discuss snow removal issues scheduled for Thursday, February 10<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 pm:

***Awaiting Report Item Number 11-01, regarding a report on practices that will mitigate problems that occur (plowing snow into areas that have been shoveled by residents) and the insufficient and/or improper shoveling of the pedestrian ways:***

***Response:*** During a storm Public Works will deploy as many as 150 pieces of snow plowing equipment to begin clearing snow. Initially these plows are simply clearing a section of each roadway to allow for safe passage. As the storm begins to wind down, these same vehicles will continue in their assigned routes, pushing snow as far back to the curb line or line of parked cars on all of the City streets. From the start of the storm and usually well into the next day, we will push back snow many times on the same streets to clear snow to the maximum extent possible. We will also generally work for several days after a storm returning to push back snow from high priority intersections.

City Ordinance does require property owners to remove snow from sidewalks next to their property or business within 12 hours of daytime snowfall and before 1:00 pm when it has fallen overnight. They must also remove or melt all ice within 6 hours of the time it forms. This Ordinance is enforced through ticketing by both Public Works compliance officers and Traffic Parking Control Officers. Given Public Works continued plowing, it is not uncommon for residents and business owners who do the right and clear their sidewalk right away to face the frustration of finding themselves plowed back in again.

During a normal winter, if a plow driver inadvertently pushes snow onto a corner ramp or driveway apron Public Works generally asks property owners to be forgiving and to assist us by re-shoveling the location. However, we understand that this winter's extraordinary snow accumulation and back-to-back storms have left many people with few places to put new snow, with little energy to continue shoveling and facing frozen snow banks when they try to reopen ramps. For this reason, Public Works has tried to return to high priority locations both to push back snow where possible, or to remove snow from locations identified as possible risks to public safety. However, in the majority of cases we cannot commit to removing snow that builds up along curb lines and driveway openings as part of normal snow plowing operations.

During this snow season, we have also tried to be more understanding in our enforcement efforts, declining to ticket properties that have made an obvious effort to clear their sidewalks and have clearly been plowed back in.

We encourage any member of the Cambridge Community who has a concern about plowing or sidewalk issues to call our 24-line at 617-349-4800, or to e-mail us at [theworks@cambridgema.gov](mailto:theworks@cambridgema.gov). We appreciate everyone's continued efforts to keep sidewalks clear, and your patience with us as our plow drivers work to manage these near record amounts of snow.

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***Awaiting Report Item Number 11-04, regarding a report on the snow removal of the sidewalks adjacent to cab stands.***

***Response:*** Cambridge City Ordinance requires property owners to remove snow from sidewalks next to their property or business within 12 hours of daytime snowfall and before 1:00 pm when it has fallen overnight. They must also remove or melt all ice within 6 hours of the time it forms. However, in a place that has wide sidewalks like Central Square, it is possible for a property owner to have cleared a generous path along their frontage and still not have cleared the entire sidewalk.

For this reason, Public Works has partnered with property owners, businesses, and the MBTA over many snow seasons to collaborate on opening up as many sidewalks, ramps, crosswalks, and bus stops in Central Square as possible. Public Works' role in this has included extra plowing, use of mechanical equipment, hand-shoveling, and limited snow removal. These efforts are generally part of our second, third, or fourth day operations, once we have met our other obligations to clear all streets and to clear sidewalks adjacent to City property.

Public Works will add opening up snow banks where the first taxi pulls up at this cab stand to our bus stop operations during upcoming storms. Please note that, as described earlier, this work will be scheduled as part of our second, third, or fourth day operations, once we have met our other obligations to clear all streets and to clear sidewalks adjacent to City

property. We will also reach out to our partners in snow clearing operations in Central Square, particularly those nearby owners and businesses who have a commercial interest in keeping taxis operating in the Square, to see what assistance they might be able to provide.

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***Awaiting Report Item Number 11-07, regarding a report on outreach and advertising the Snow Exemption Program.***

***Response:*** Homeowners, who are on a low income (\$23,475 or less for a one-person household) ***and*** are either elderly or have a disability, maybe qualify for the City's Snow Exemption program, in which case the City will shovel their sidewalk.

To apply, homeowners should call the Council on Aging at 617-349-6220 (voice) or 617-349-6050 (TTY).

Each year, including 2010-2011, information on this program is included in a Snow brochure that is sent directly to each property owner with the water/sewer bill. Information on this program is available at City Buildings including City Hall and 344 Broadway (during resident parking sticker renewal process). In addition, this information is on the City's web site and promoted in both the Council on Aging and Disabilities Commission's newsletters.

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***Awaiting Report Item Number 11-08, regarding a report on the number of snow tickets issues and on the response time for responding to complaints:***

***Response:*** City Ordinance requires property owners to remove snow from sidewalks next to their property or business within 12 hours of daytime snowfall and before 1:00 pm when it has fallen overnight. They must also remove or melt all ice within 6 hours of the time it forms.

As of February 9, 2011, the City had received a total of 1,992 complaints of uncleared sidewalks, and issued a total of 966 tickets this winter.

Traffic Parking Control Officers and Public Works Compliance Officers are sent out to inspect all complaints received about unshoveled or icy sidewalks. The City receives complaints from numerous sources, but enters all complaints into the web-based form we also encourage residents to use (posted at <http://www2.cambridgema.gov/theworks/services/snow/complaint.aspx>), because this form helps us to track complaints and assign them to a responsible department based on location.

Complaints are generally investigated on the first full business day after the snow ordinance has gone into effect, and inspections continue until all complaints have been inspected. Given the large number of storms this winter in close succession, it has been difficult to inspect all complaints within the first day a violation may be occurring. However, we have endeavored to inspect locations as quickly as possible.

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***Awaiting Report Item Number 11-13, regarding a report removing improperly placed furniture items that are reserving parking spaces:***

***Response:*** Please be advised that the Department of Public Works has been collecting improperly placed furniture and other items reserving parking spots since mid-January. In addition, if residents would like to request pick up from a specific location, they are encouraged to contact Public Works at 617-349-4800 or [theworks@cambridgema.gov](mailto:theworks@cambridgema.gov).

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***Council Order No. 4, dated 1/24/2011, regarding the use of City garages during snow emergencies and reinstating the use of bullhorns to announce snow emergencies.***

***Response:*** The City has tried to be responsive to the parking challenges facing residents during this extraordinary snow season. For the snow emergency on January 21 beginning at 11 pm, garages were free starting at 4pm. In association with the snow emergency that began on January 26, 2011 at 7 pm, all four garages that offer residents parking did so starting at 5 pm. Parking was also available through the weekend for residents impacted by snow-related parking restrictions. In association with the snow emergency that began on February 1, 2011 at 8 pm, Cambridge resident with stickers were permitted to park for free through February 7 at the First Street and Galleria Garages. The City will continue to work to provide parking by 8 P.M. when there is a later snow emergency time, and to provide additional parking resources for residents impacted by snow.

At present, the Police Department does use bullhorns to notify residents that cars are being towed; however, bullhorns are not used in association with towing operations between 11 pm and 6 am because of concerns about noise. The City also seeks to minimize tows due to snow emergencies by using as many methods of outreach as possible to inform the community such as e-line (e-mail and text alerts) and other newer online sources. This outreach appears to be working, as the number of snow emergency-related tows during this winter has declined when compared with past years.

## Winter 2010/2011

### Goals of snow parking and towing operations

1. Make sure the travel lanes can accommodate emergency vehicles, trash trucks, home heating oil deliveries.
2. Make sure streets can accommodate buses – MBTA, School buses, EZ Ride, etc, and general traffic.
3. Plow out metered spaces (no one is going to shovel these spaces out to use them).
4. Give residents as many safe places to park without snow emergency restrictions to reduce the time and number of tows needed to clear the key streets.

~~Make it a priority to clear snow from residential permit parking spaces. This responsibility falls to the residents who have to shovel out their own cars.~~

#### Streets posted no parking after the snow emergency is lifted.

This has been a recurring issue over the years and we have posted a small number of streets during heavy snow events. This year we have been required to post many more and more frequently because of the continuous snow and large accumulation. Some streets are just too narrow to allow parking even after the plowing is complete. These postings cannot be removed until the snow melts or DPW has been able to remove the snow. There are a handful of streets in the City which are reviewed at each storm to determine whether parking can be allowed back. If there is insufficient room it is signed No Parking until further notice with paper signs.

#### Snowbound cars.

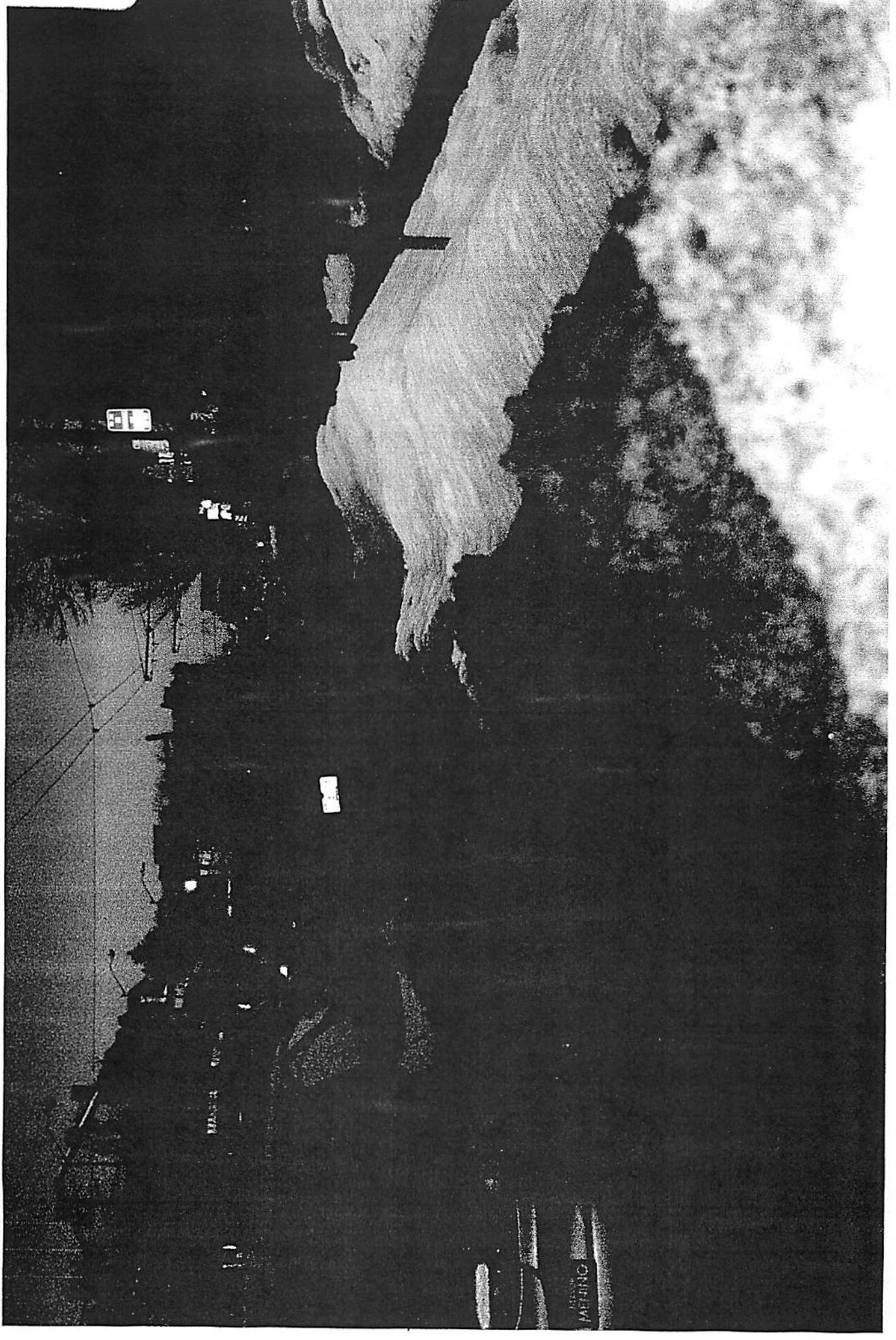
It is extremely frustrating when a car remains snowbound and you are having trouble finding parking among the snow piles. A snowbound car is parked right against the curb and does not obstruct the travel lanes. When there is a windrow the parked car can not get as close to the curb and may be blocking the travel lane. Snow restricts travel for all cars and increases congestion – a snowbound car is not cloughing up the streets when you are trying to get around. Snowbound cars are not a safety problem. As long as they have a valid residential permit they should be left where they are.

#### Parking tickets that say "10 ft Lane".

If a street normally allows parking but due to snow it is not possible to park there without obstructing the travel lane a ticket will be issued. The violation means that you have parked in such a way as to reduce the travel lane to less than 10' wide and are therefore blocking travel.

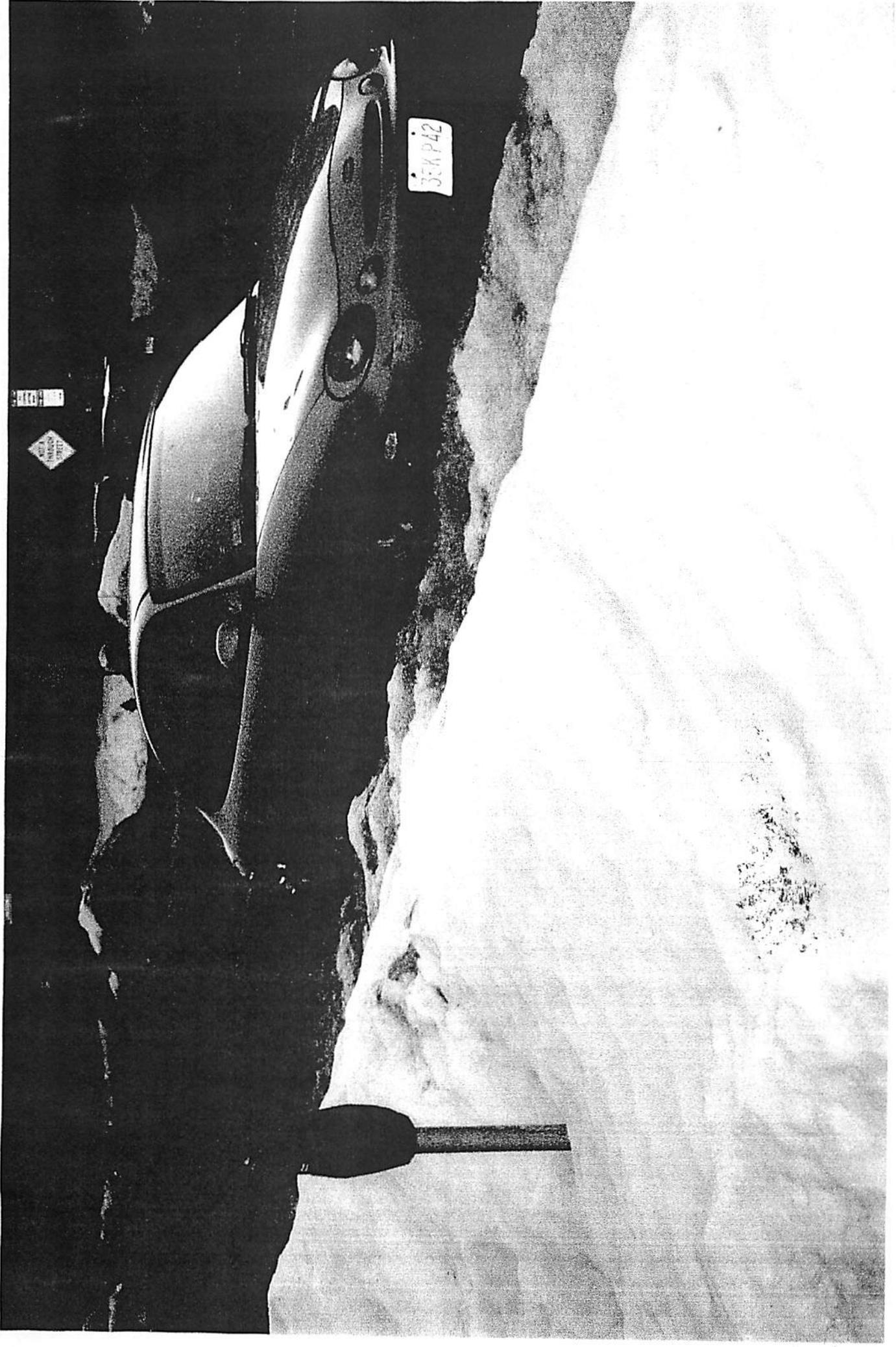
ATT C-1

E. side of Mass. Ave. below Wendell (Looking N)



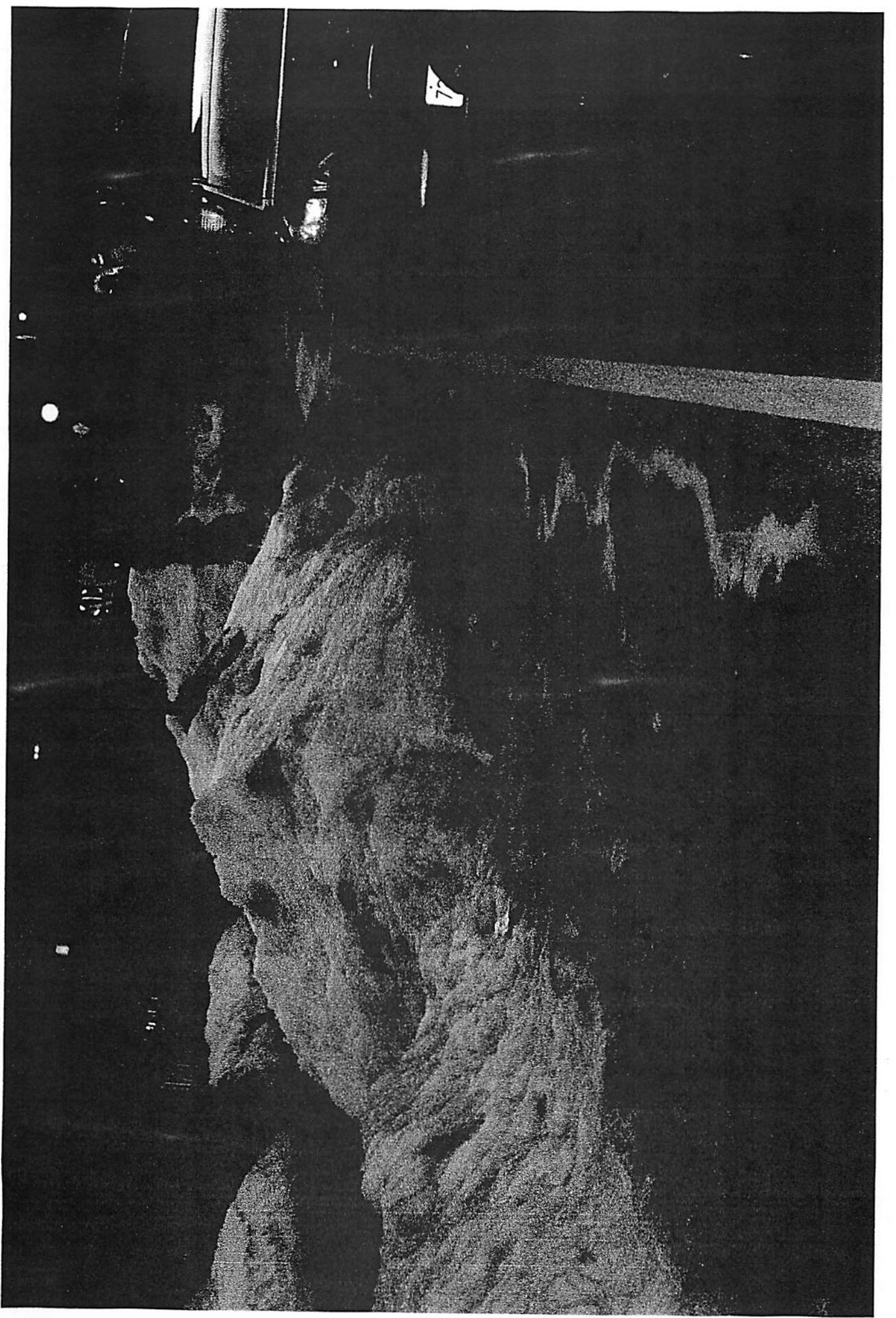
ATTC-2

E. side of Mass. Ave. below Wendell

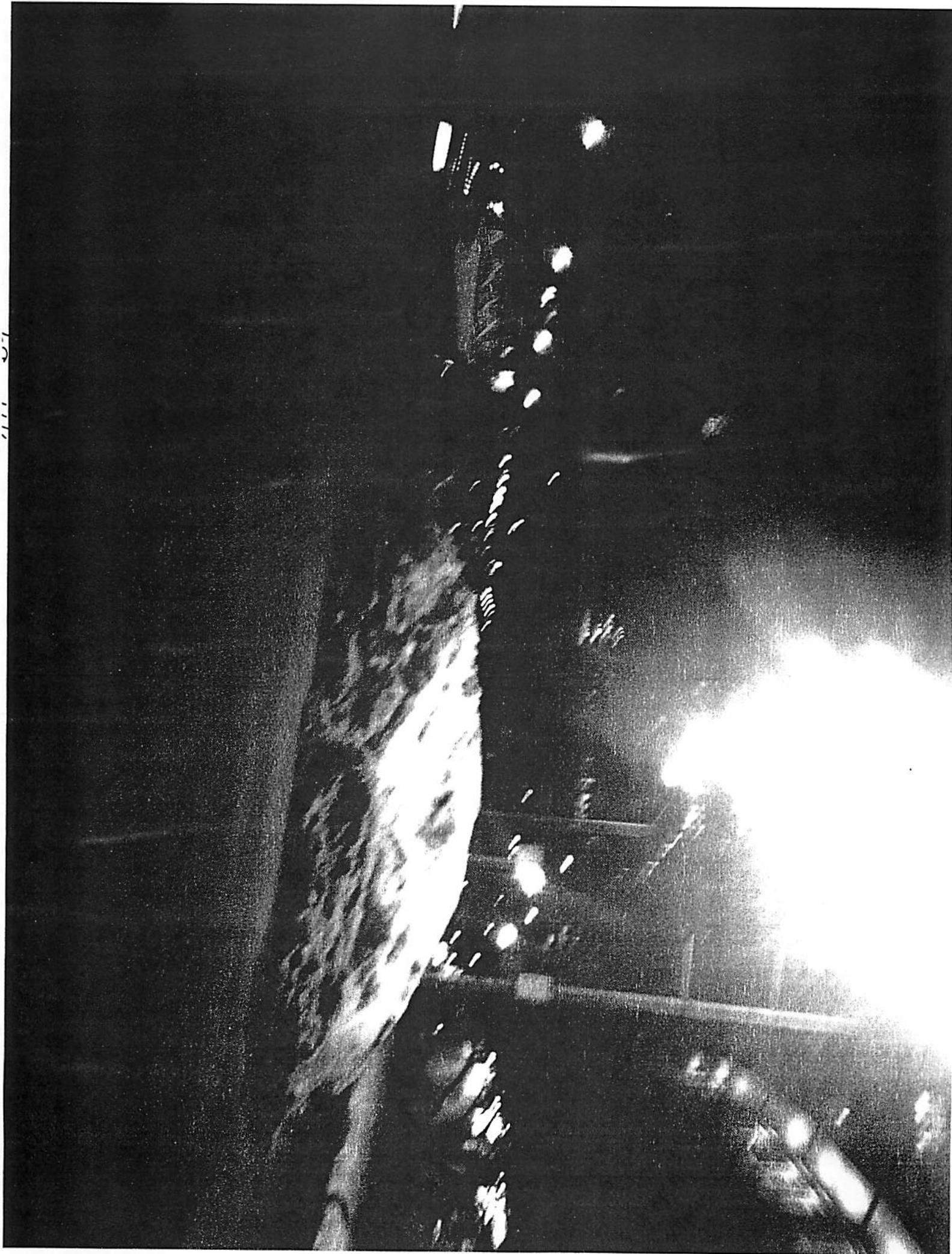


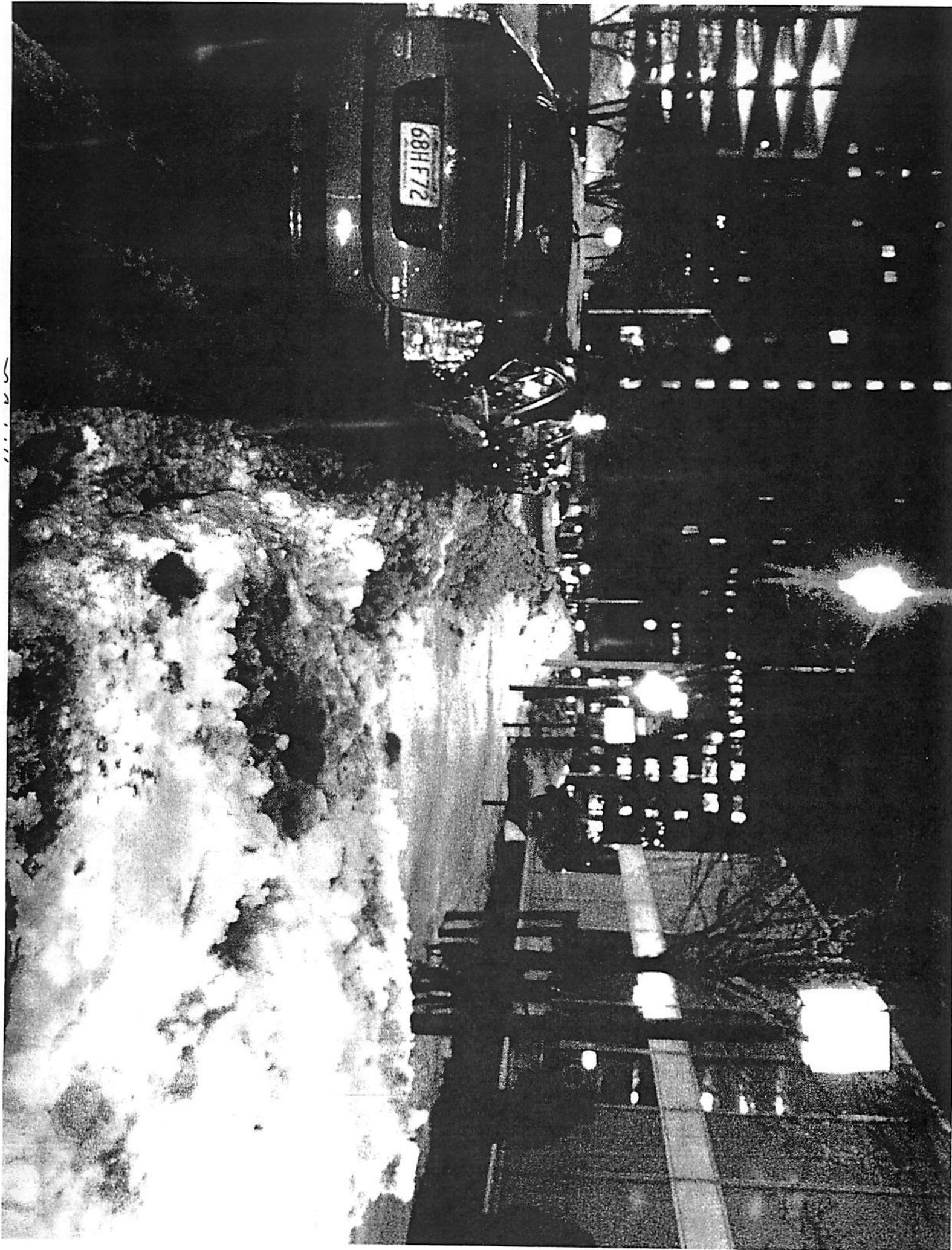
ATT C-3

Wendell St., just east of Mass. Ave.



111 57





ATT D-3

OFFICE

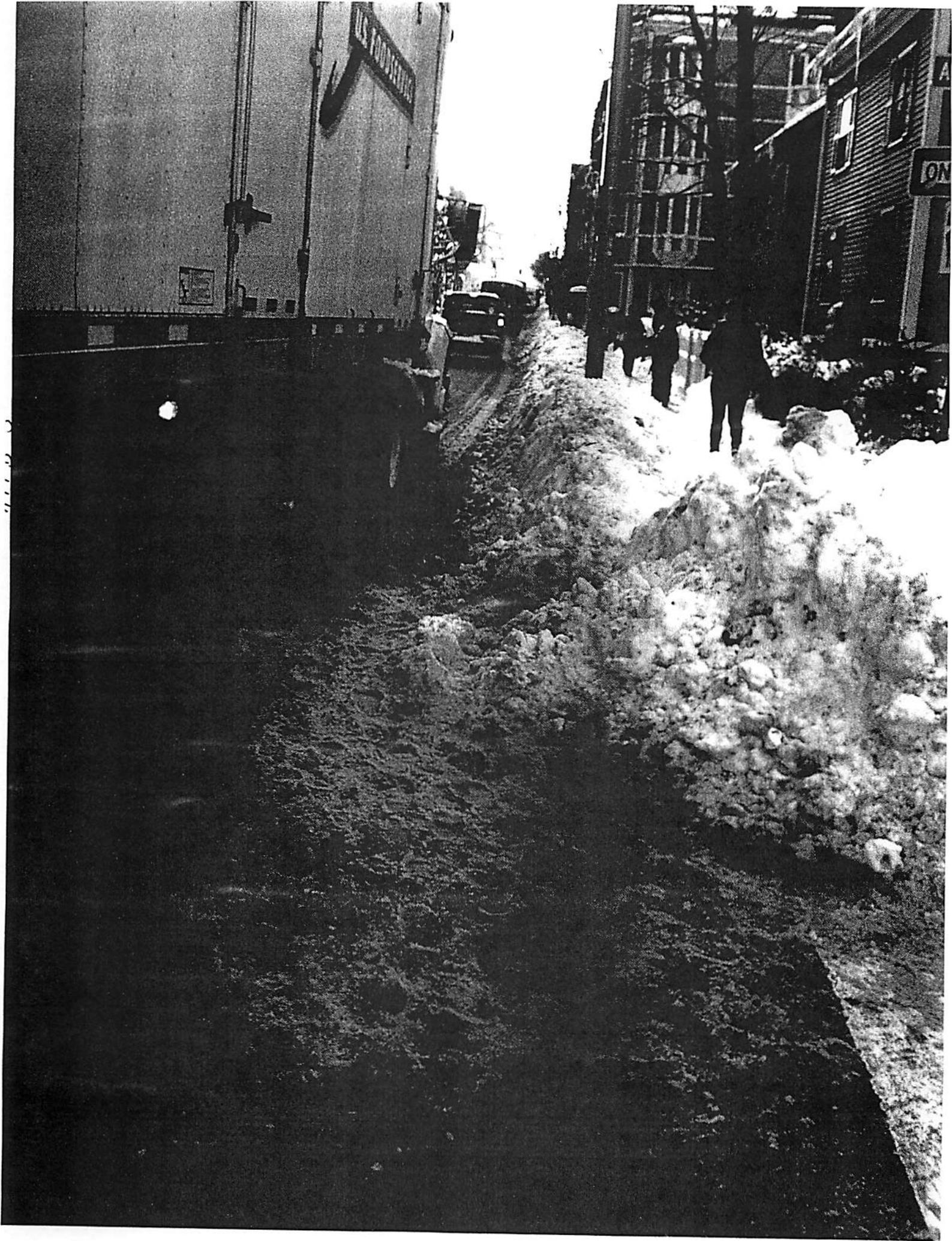




ONE WAY

TRUCKS  
OR  
TRAILERS

111 27



Lopez, Donna

**From:** Fred Meyer, Realtor & Real Estate Appraiser [fred@universityre.com]  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 10, 2011 4:39 PM  
**To:** Lopez, Donna  
**Cc:** Stephen Diamond; 'Phoebe Sinclair'; Muehe, Michael; 'JoAnn & David Haas'  
**Subject:** for today's 5:30 hearing

**UNIVERSITY REAL ESTATE**  
**Overlooking Harvard Square in Cambridge, MA**  
617-876-1200 fred@universityre.com

Donna,

I'm sorry that, because a conflict has come up, I can't attend tonight's hearing of the Traffic, Transportation and Parking Committee on important snow-removal issues.

Could you please give this to the committee members?

Here's what I'd hoped to say:

Even though it will inevitably mean somewhat higher real estate taxes: it's time for dramatically expanded citywide snow-removal services.

1. We have seen both a fire truck and having to back up, unable to enter Hammond Street from Oxford Street, because parked cars on either side of the street made entry by any big vehicle impossible.  
(This for a street with the historic frame 1831 Palfrey farmhouse, once owning 12 acres of the Agassiz neighborhood, plus a huge new Harvard science lab.)  
The UPS truck couldn't make it through for several days after two snowstorms.

What good are low taxes if our fire-insurance rates eventually go up because of hampered fire protection?  
We need *extra crews* to make sure *all street entrances* are safe for fire equipment.

2. For far too long after recent snowstorms, sidewalk shoveling has ended in mounds of snow at intersections. Mounds dumped by city snowplows have blocked access from crosswalk to sidewalk (and vice versa). (Handicap ramps, of course, have also been blocked).

After streets have been plowed, we need a *second crew*, riding not a big truck but *small narrow Bobcat-type vehicles with plows*, to open up suitable pedestrian paths through these inevitable large mounds of snow. Meetings I've attended of the Agassiz Neighborhood Council and the Disabilities Commission have endorsed this position.

3. "Reserved" street parking spaces are anti-social and simply cannot be tolerated. Obviously, we cannot hold parking spaces perpetually open for whoever first shoveled a spot. Street spaces are not private property, but common open space, designed to be shared. If the space you shoveled out is taken, find another one someone else shoveled out.

Here I do *not* feel that paying more, for an extra barrier-pickup crew, is necessary.

Instead, the city should simply announce a clear public policy, saying, "Don't try to save a spot. And if you see that someone is trying that, please lift that barrier off the street and place it between the curb and the sidewalk."

Encouraging *responsible citizen action* will cost nothing.

If you don't feel comfortable removing a close neighbor's old chair, remove one you see further away.

If everyone does that, they'll all be gone.

And, as people discover that saving a space is widely-stigmatized behavior, they'll eventually stop.

These steps will all help. But, envisioning the future, I can see even more expansions of city services in this area.

The city owns *both* our streets *and* our sidewalks. *Why does it plow one but not the other?*

*Why do we ask citizens to hand-shovel the city's sidewalks?*

Wouldn't expanded crews of Bobcat plows be very much more efficient?

And ultimately less costly. Some services are much better purchased wholesale than retail. I've seen one small Harvard plow do a *whole block* in the time it takes us to hand-shovel the sidewalk at my house.

Cambridge has by far the lowest tax rates around. Why don't we raise taxes a bit and add 'first-pass sidewalk plowing' as a city-provided service?

Is it really sensible health policy to ask all our property owners, many of whom are elderly, to get out there and shovel?

Let's expand our reputation as a progressive city by taking the lead in this area.

Let's provide much-better-thought-out city snow service and become a nationwide model of intelligent snow removal.

Hope this is helpful.

Sorry to miss your discussion.

Best wishes,

Fred Meyer

83 Hammond Street

Fred Meyer, Realtor® and Real Estate Appraiser

Owner/manager (for 47 years) of

University Real Estate, Harvard Square

Cambridge, MA 02138-1959

617-876-1200 office

617-308-4684 cell

617-812-8031 personal fax

2010 Director, Multiple Listing Service (MLS-PIN)

2000 President, MA Realtors®

1991 President, Greater Boston Realtors®

1981 President, Cambridge Realtors®