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OPINION

BATES REPORT

Property Managers Try To Stay One Step Ahead Of Record Snow

Unprecedented Attention Paid To Sidewalks, Roofs

BY DAVID BATES

SPECIAL TO BANKER & TRADESMAN

When I passed 53 State St., its sidewalk was pristine. It didn't look as if record snow had fallen over the past 30 days. And there wasn't a head-high barricade of the white stuff separating the street from the sidewalk. Instead, the pavement next to the downtown high rise looked like my house after the cleaners had come: a happy place to be.



DAVID BATES

Ditto, One Federal Street. Ditto the concourses of a few other buildings I saw in the Financial District. Here I was, in the heart of Boston, in the midst of snowmageddon 2015, and totally amazed that a number of outdoor

spaces were pitching no-hitters against the relentless snowfall. How could it be?

"When you have buildings that are professionally managed, people are prepared for this," explained Luis Alvarado, senior managing director at Cushman Wakefield. Alvarado, who has 30 years in property management, told me that there's a plan of action in place for snow removal and because vendors already know what the plan is, they can get going upon the first falling snowflake. Still, I marveled at execution of the snow removal plan at these buildings. Bill Belichick couldn't have asked for more.

While some property managers are committed to keeping spotless sidewalks, others

are going over and above and removing snow from roofs. Removing snow from either area of course increases public safety and lowers an owner's liability.

Looking Up

Jon Lindberg and David Morand, structural engineers at Gale Assoc. Inc., told me they have inspected more than 100 buildings this winter and their phones still haven't stopped ringing. When assessing a roof's integrity, the engineers typically review structural documents to see how a building is framed and how it might have been modified, speak with maintenance personnel, inspect the building inside and out, and even use specialized cones to measure snow density. In determining the additional load the roof is carrying because of the weather, the engineers also factor in things like ice layers underneath the snow and the possibility that a rain event in the future may add to the load. When they're done assessing the roof, they can make a variety of recommendations. "It is a case-by-case scenario," said Morand. "There's no cookie cutter to it."

Mark Tassinari, executive vice president with CBRE New England who is responsible for a 35-million-square-foot property management portfolio, said his company has been proactively removing snow from roofs, and that at times it can involve having a crane lift a 3,000-pound dumpster bag over the side of the building, to have it loaded with snow a few hundred times by roofing personnel. After the bag is lowered back down, a front-end loader will either dump it elsewhere on the land or

have it hauled away. Of course, every measure to improve roof safety isn't as expensive, but Tassinari said the cost of removing snow off the roof of just one building could exceed \$100,000.

Tassinari said that his properties haven't had any roof collapses and thought the roof collapses he had heard about were a result of people not paying attention to drifts on the roof. "What it boils down to is having a proactive plan," he said, adding, "If you wait 'til the end and say, 'Gee, I got eight feet of snow on my roof,' it's too late."

Despite the challenges of a winter that some have called intense and painful, the professionals I spoke with had a glass half-full attitude. Paul Smith, a commercial snow removal contractor who typically has 15 pieces of equipment out on a storm, noted that we had four big storms in a row and that "sometimes we go years and don't have one storm like that," but he also pointed out that "the bitter cold was good because it made the snow lighter, fluffier and easier to plow." Tassinari told me, "We've been fortunate that we haven't lost power." Tassinari said that if power had gone out there would have been no way to keep sprinkler and water pipes warm in many buildings and it would have been "a nightmare." Lindberg and Morand even said that the winter of 2011 was worse. ■

David Bates is a broker with William Raveis Real Estate and author of The Bates Real Estate Blog, www.BatesRealEstateReport.com, and a recently published e-book, "Context: Nine Key Condo Markets, 2.0."

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