

Who Will Shovel the Sidewalks?

Nobody asked but ...

Statists will often counter query, “but who will shovel the sidewalks?,” whenever the question comes up, “Why does the state have to be involved in everything?” Today, I encountered a sidewalk to nowhere. It was perfectly cleared of snow for about the length of a rugby pitch, but at each end was an unmarked expanse of snow and a 2 foot roadplow drift. The sidewalk was unuseable for me, because my usual response to winter is to wear socks with my sandals. It also was apparently unuseable to anyone else, because the snow lay round about undinted and by footsteps unprinted. There was not even any evidence of how the sidewalk clearer arrived and exited. But obviously this sidewalk had been cleared to comply with some ordinance that required property owners to clear sidewalks adjacent to public thoroughfares. (In fact the sidewalk had probably been built to comply slavishly with some zoning prerequisite.) And I’ll bet that the unknown property owner had been spurred to action by a previous citation (i.e. a threat of violence, state-monopoly-style). Do sidewalks really need to be regulated? Quibble amongst yourselves. My answer to the opening question — useful sidewalks will be cleared by people who want to use them, voluntarily.

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