

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
SECOND JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

Clancy v. Powell

Clancy, 2026 NY Slip Op 01761 (Supreme Court of the State of New York Appellate Division Second Judicial Department 2026) · No. 2021-04495 · Decided March 25, 2026

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, Second Department, affirmed an order granting summary judgment to the Town of Smithtown and Smithtown Highway Department in a personal-injury action arising from a motor vehicle collision allegedly caused by roadway sand. The court held that the plaintiff failed to establish an exception to the prior written notice requirement or raise a triable issue concerning the municipality's creation or notice of a dangerous condition.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Colleen D. Duffy, J.P.; William G. Ford, J.; Donna-Marie E. Golia, J.; Susan Quirk, J.
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Second Department
DECIDED	March 25, 2026
DOCKET	2021-04495
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff appealed from an order granting the Town of Smithtown and Smithtown Highway Department summary judgment dismissing the personal-injury complaint against them.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Appellate Division reviewed whether the Town defendants established prima facie entitlement to summary judgment as a matter of law and whether the plaintiff raised a triable issue of fact or established an exception to the prior written notice requirement.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published appellate decision
PARTIES	Dennis T. Clancy v. Michael R. Powell, Town of Smithtown, Smithtown Highway Department

TOPICS

municipal liability

summary judgment

personal injury

standard of review

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

municipal liability

premises liability

personal injury

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Town defendants were entitled to summary judgment based on the plaintiff's failure to establish prior written notice of the alleged roadway defect or an exception to that requirement.
2. Whether the plaintiff raised a triable issue of fact concerning actual or constructive notice, municipal creation of the alleged dangerous condition, or negligent highway and storm-drain maintenance.
3. Whether the Town defendants established that they did not create the alleged dangerous condition through oversanding or failure to maintain storm drains.

HOLDINGS

1. Because the Town had adopted a prior written notice law, the Town defendants could not be held liable for the alleged roadway defect absent the requisite written notice unless the plaintiff established that the municipality affirmatively created the hazard through an act of negligence or that a special use exception applied.
2. A municipality's liability for an alleged dangerous roadway condition requires proof that it had actual or constructive notice of the condition and failed to take reasonable measures to correct it; the plaintiff failed to raise a triable issue on those elements.
3. Although winter sanding activities may, in a proper case, support municipal liability, the Town defendants established prima facie that they did not create the alleged dangerous condition through oversanding or improper storm-drain maintenance, and the plaintiff's expert affidavit was conclusory and speculative.

KEY QUOTATIONS

*“There are only two exceptions to a prior written notice requirement: ‘[s]uch notice is obviated where the plaintiff demonstrates that the municipality created the defect or hazard through an affirmative act of negligence or that a special use conferred a benefit on the municipality’” ([*1])*

“Where the plaintiff alleges that the subject accident was caused by a dangerous condition, liability will not attach unless the municipality had actual or constructive notice of the dangerous condition and subsequently failed to take reasonable measures to correct the dangerous condition” (at 1023)

“Winter sanding activities are part of a town's day-to-day operations for which, in a proper case, liability may be imposed” (at 642)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

In March 2016, Clancy was a passenger in a vehicle driven by Michael R. Powell when the vehicle allegedly lost control after contacting sand on a roadway in the Town of Smithtown and crashed. Clancy alleged that the Town defendants were responsible for the roadway condition, including alleged oversanding and inadequate storm-drain maintenance. The Town defendants submitted evidence that they had received no complaints about sand on the roadway or flooding storm drains at the crash location, that there were generally no complaints for the site, and that complaints concerning the drains had been resolved before the crash. Their expert opined that the sanding process was consistent with normal highway-maintenance practices and that the vehicle lost control on an unsanded portion of pavement rather than because of contact with sand.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Clancy commenced the action in May 2017 based on injuries allegedly sustained in a March 2016 motor-vehicle collision. The Town defendants moved for summary judgment, arguing, among other things, lack of prior written notice and lack of actual or constructive notice of the alleged roadway hazard. The Supreme Court, Suffolk County, granted the motion on May 24, 2021, and the Appellate Division affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- DeSalvio v Suffolk County Water Auth., 127 AD3d 804, 805
- Thompson v Nassau County, 200 AD3d 823, 825
- Groninger v Village of Mamaroneck, 17 NY3d 125, 127-128
- Morreale v Town of Smithtown, 153 AD3d 917, 918
- Heins v Vanbourgonidien, 180 AD3d 1019, 1023
- Schleuter v Town of Brookhaven, 304 AD2d 641, 642
- Hepburn v Croce, 295 AD2d 475, 476
- Huertas v Town of Smithtown, 226 AD3d 656, 658
- Sasso v Village of Bronxville, 208 AD3d 910, 911-912

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

Clancy v Powell (2026 NY Slip Op 01761) Clancy v Powell 2026 NY Slip Op 01761 Decided on March 25, 2026 Appellate Division, Second Department Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431. This opinion is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports. Decided on March 25, 2026 SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department COLLEEN D. DUFFY, J.P.

WILLIAM G. FORD DONNA-MARIE E. GOLIA SUSAN QUIRK, JJ. 2021-04495 (Index No. 610057/17) [*1]Dennis T. Clancy, appellant, v Michael R. Powell, defendant, Town of Smithtown, et al., respondents. Queller, Fisher, Washor, Fuchs & Kool and The Law Office of William A. Gallina, LLP, New York, NY (Matthew J. Maiorana of counsel), for appellant. Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, LLP, Ronkonkoma, NY (Richard A. DeMaio and Scott D. Middleton of counsel), for respondents.

DECISION & ORDER In an action to recover damages for personal injuries, the plaintiff appeals from an order of the Supreme Court, Suffolk County (John H. Rouse, J.), dated May 24, 2021. The order granted the motion of the defendants Town of Smithtown and Smithtown Highway Department for summary judgment dismissing the complaint insofar as asserted against them.

ORDERED that the order is affirmed, with costs. In May 2017, the plaintiff commenced this action against the defendants Town of Smithtown and Smithtown Highway Department (hereinafter together the Town defendants) and the defendant Michael R. Powell (hereinafter the defendant driver) to recover damages for personal injuries the plaintiff alleged he sustained in a motor vehicle collision in March 2016, as a passenger in a vehicle driven by the defendant driver.

The complaint alleged, inter alia, that on the night at issue, the defendant driver lost control of his vehicle when it made contact with sand on a roadway in the Town and crashed, causing the plaintiff to sustain personal injuries.

The Town defendants moved for summary judgment dismissing the complaint insofar as asserted against them. The plaintiff opposed. In an order dated May 24, 2021, the Supreme Court granted the Town defendants' motion.

The plaintiff appeals. "Where, as here, a municipality has adopted a prior written notice law, it cannot be held liable for a defect within the scope of the law absent the requisite written notice, unless an exception to the requirement applies" (*DeSalvio v Suffolk County Water Auth.*, 127 AD3d 804, 805; see Code of Town of Smithtown §§ 245-13, 245-14). "There are only two exceptions to a prior written notice requirement: '[s]uch notice is obviated where the plaintiff demonstrates that the municipality created the defect or hazard through an affirmative act of negligence or that a special use conferred a benefit on the municipality'" (*Thompson v Nassau County*, 200 AD3d 823, 825, quoting *Groninger v Village of Mamaroneck*, 17 NY3d 125, 127-128; see *Morreale v Town of Smithtown*, 153 AD3d 917, 918).

Moreover, "[w]here the plaintiff alleges that the subject accident was caused by a dangerous condition, liability will not attach unless the municipality had actual or constructive notice of the dangerous condition and subsequently failed to take reasonable measures [*2]to correct the dangerous condition" (*Heins v Vanbourgondien*, 180 AD3d 1019, 1023 [internal quotation marks omitted]).

"A municipality's duty to maintain its highways extends to conditions beyond the travel lanes and shoulders only when a prior accident or other event would give notice of a specific dangerous condition" (*id.* [internal quotation marks omitted]).

The Town defendants established their prima facie entitlement to judgment as a matter of law by submitting evidence that established that they did not receive any complaints regarding the sand on the roadway or the storm drains flooding in the area where the crash occurred, that there were generally no complaints on file for the crash site, and that any complaints submitted regarding the drains were resolved before the crash occurred.

In opposition, the plaintiff failed to raise a triable issue of fact or establish that an exception to the prior written notice requirement applied. "Winter sanding activities are part of a town's day-to-day operations for which, in a proper case, liability may be imposed" (*Schleuter v Town of Brookhaven*, 304 AD2d 641, 642; see *Hepburn v Croce*, 295 AD2d 475, 476).

Contrary to the plaintiff's contention, the Town defendants demonstrated, prima facie, that they did not create the allegedly dangerous condition by oversanding the roadway or by failing to properly maintain the storm drains.

Here, in support of their motion, the Town defendants submitted, inter alia, an expert affidavit of a professional engineer in which he opined that the Town defendants' sanding process was consistent with normal practices of highway maintenance.

The Town defendants' expert further averred that the driver lost control of the vehicle on the unsanded portion of the pavement, rather than as a result of contact with the sand. The plaintiff failed to raise a triable issue of fact in opposition (see *Huertas v Town of Smithtown*, 226 AD3d 656, 658).

The affidavit of the plaintiff's expert was conclusory and speculative and, therefore, failed to raise a triable issue of fact (see *id.*; *Sasso v Village of Bronxville*, 208 AD3d 910, 911-912). Accordingly, the Supreme Court properly granted the Town defendants' motion for summary judgment dismissing the complaint insofar as asserted against them.

The parties' remaining contentions either are without merit or need not be reached in light of the foregoing. DUFFY, J.P., FORD, GOLIA and QUIRK, JJ., concur. ENTER: Darrell M. Joseph Clerk of the Court