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Few braved the snow in February

Museum attendance, crime both declined

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JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

The New England Aquarium saw a substantial drop in attendance because of February snowstorms.

By Peter Schworm and Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 10, 2015

One foot of snow after the next, Boston effectively froze in place this February. Leaving the house proved more trouble than it was worth.

The brave souls who did venture out to a museum or other cultural destination often found they had the run of the place. At the Museum of Fine Arts, which closed for four days in February, attendance dropped 24 percent over the same month last year. Visits to the usually bustling New England Aquarium dropped by 49 percent, and attendance at the Institute of Contemporary Art declined by 30 percent.

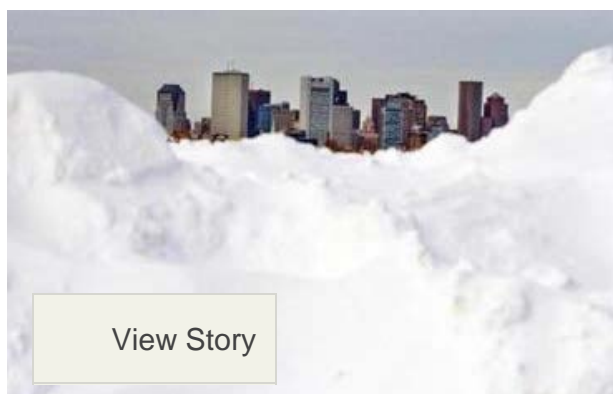


The blizzards also kept shoppers and diners at home, eroding sales tax revenue and parking-ticket proceeds. Even would-be thieves seemed to hunker down, pushing down the crime rate in

the process.

And tourism? “The only other time periods that saw such a drop-off in visitor activity and visitor spending were in the aftermaths of the terrorism acts of 9/11 and the Marathon bombings,” said Pat Moscaritolo, president of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau. The winter was the slowest in the past 25 years, he said.

While leisure travel and weekend trips fell dramatically, hotels maintained a base of business travelers. But restaurants saw declines “across the board,” he said.



Barrage of snow battered small businesses

As snow has piled high this winter, sales have slumped dramatically for small businesses across the state, especially for retailers and restaurants, according to a new survey.

Winter storms impose high costs for business

Area churches financially hit by snowstorms

“Pretty much a perfect storm, unfortunately, from a financial perspective,” Moscaritolo said.

Paul Guzzi, president and CEO of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, said that even the Blizzard of 1978 didn’t have such a prolonged effect.

“In one word, the impact has been terrible,” he said.

Amid widespread public transportation failures and parking woes that turned daily life into an Arctic ordeal, attendance fell 40 percent at Boston’s Central Library in Copley Square from a year before.

“Just getting in and out of Boston was a daunting task,” said Jane Wolfson, a spokeswoman for the aquarium.

The state’s revenue department estimated that the February storms may have reduced tax revenue by \$37 million, mainly from declines in meal and fuel taxes.

The harsh winter has come with some silver linings.

In Boston, reports of the most serious crime were down 33 percent overall between Jan. 1 and March 8, compared with the same span last year. There have been significantly fewer homicides, rapes, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries, larcenies, and vehicle thefts, according to police department statistics.

Amid parking bans and buried meters, parking meter revenues plunged from mid-January to mid-February, from \$811,000 last year to \$444,000 this year.



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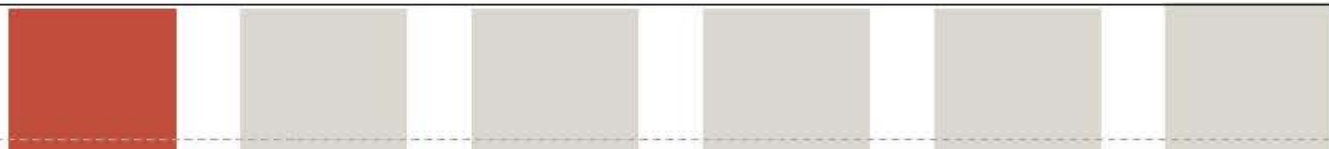
Parking meter revenues in February were down 45 percent.

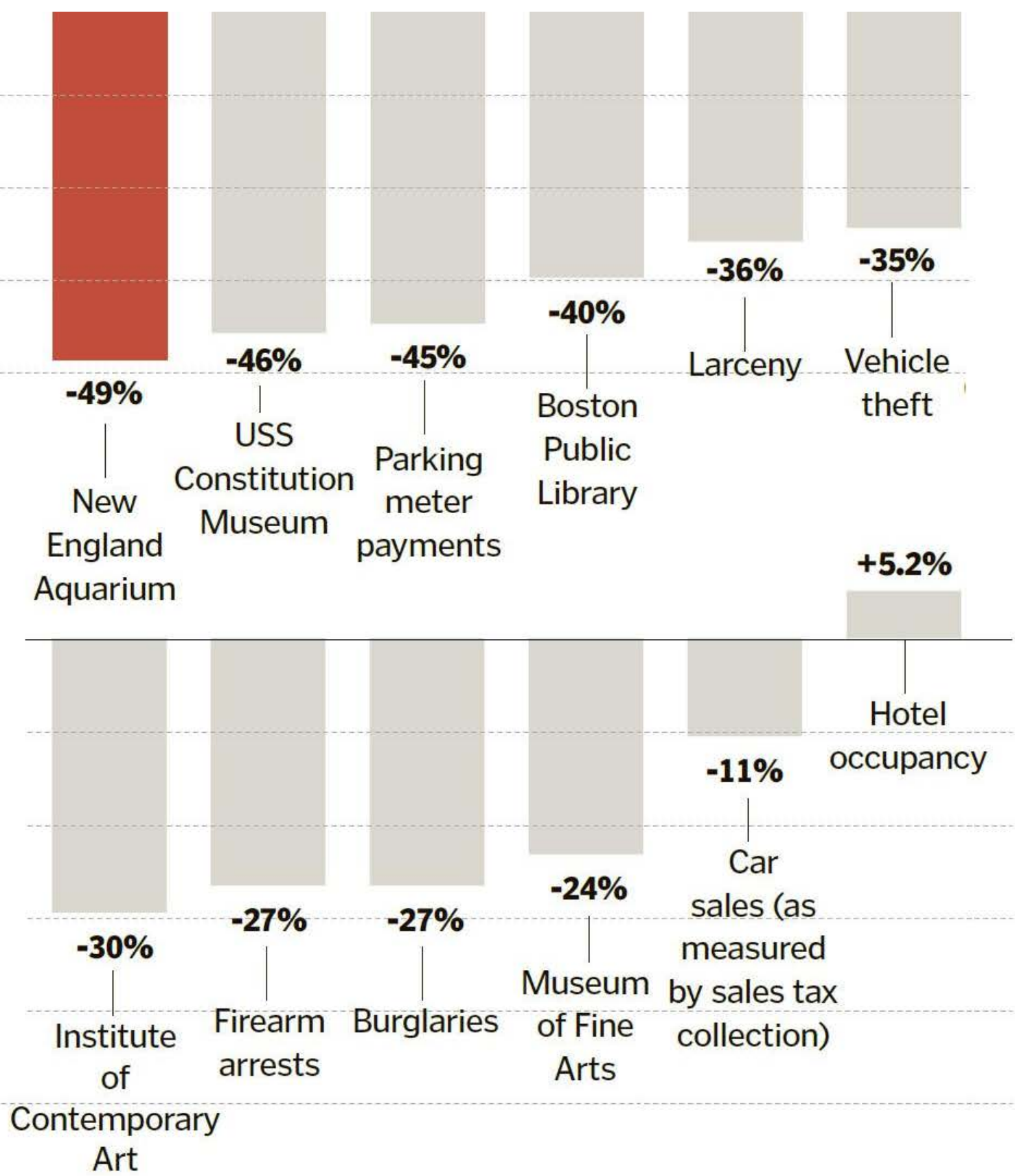
Parking-ticket proceeds declined from more than \$4 million last February to \$3.26 million this year. The city is allowing people to park for free for two hours if snow is blocking the meter.

“We certainly don’t want anyone to get hurt,” said Tracey Ganiatsos, a spokeswoman for the city’s transportation department.

Such parking difficulties made recreational trips seem onerous. In more reasonable winters, a museum might seem an ideal place to while away an afternoon, freeing up summer days for outdoor activities.

Boston saw record snowfall totals for the month of February, and a number of attractions and services were affected. Some of the changes from February 2014 to last month:





Numbers for USS Constitution Museum are approximate for 2015. ICA totals from mid-January through the end of February. Parking meter numbers are Jan. 15-Feb. 15. Crime totals are Jan. 1-March 8.

SOURCES: City of Boston, Boston Police Department, Department of Revenue, TravelClick Inc.

PETER SCHWORM, MATT ROCHELEAU, LUKE KNOX/GLOBE STAFF

But as the relentless series of storms pummeled the city, getting around became a chore.

Because of school closings, field trips were postponed. And school vacation, usually a big week for museums, fell victim to winter's onslaught.

In all, the impact was unprecedented, museum officials said. "This is a first we hope never to repeat," Wolfson said.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra lost some \$400,000 in ticket sales because of inclement weather, a 20 percent drop from last winter. The Museum of Science, which closed five times in recent weeks, also saw substantial declines, particularly during school vacation.

At Boston Children's Museum, usually a lifeline for snowbound, stir-crazy families, attendance dropped 40 percent in February.

"We were down," said Jo-Anne Baxter, director of public relations for the museum, which closed six times during the snowiest stretch in city history. "Like everyone else."

Attendance at museums has begun to rebound. School groups have rescheduled, trains are more reliable, and life has generally returned to normal.

Even the towering snowbanks are being whittled down to size.

As the crowds return, those who braved the worst can indulge in a bit of self-congratulation. Hassle aside, it was the best time to go.

"It was kind of like having the aquarium to yourself," Wolfson said.

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