
Submitted on: November 01, 2001
Report: PW-01-067

Report To: Public Works Advisory Committee
Subject: SIDEWALK SNOW CLEARING

ORIGIN

On January 29, 2001, Council directed the Public Works Department to implement Option "B" (Town Assumes Responsibility for Priority Sidewalks Only) of Public Works Report PW-01-006 for the balance of the 2000/2001 winter season with funding from contingency reserves. This report addresses the experience of the past winter season and examines options for service delivery.

BACKGROUND

The Town's involvement in sidewalk snow clearing has evolved in the last couple of years going from a reactive to a proactive approach in priority areas to ensure that sidewalks are cleared in a timely manner.

A survey of other Niagara area municipalities conducted at a Public Works Officials meeting this past February indicated that Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Lincoln and Welland all have by-laws in effect which places the onus for the removal of ice and snow from sidewalks on the abutting property owner/resident. This has met with varying degrees of success. Where there is follow up it has been on a delayed reaction basis.

The Town's By-law No. 115-71, which was enacted in 1971, placed the responsibility for the clearing and removal of snow and ice from municipal sidewalks on the abutting property owner. This by-law is still in effect, however, the policy was changed in October of 1999 to ensure that key sections of sidewalk are monitored and maintained to the standard set out in the by-law. This was subsequently revised in October of 2000 to provide more time following a storm event (from 12 hours to 16 hours) and a greater accumulation of snow (from 50 mm to 75 mm) before calling a contractor to do the work. Reports PW-00-77 and PW-01-006 are appended to this report as further background to the previous investigation. A copy of the current Policy PDS-BLE-003A is also attached to this report.

DISCUSSION

The experience of last winter involved two methods for treating priority sidewalks (13.1 km). Prior to Council's resolution, the Town had invoiced noncompliant residents for three storm events for which the average cost amounted to \$0.50 per foot of frontage per event. This cost included all contractor and administrative charges. The contractor's cost for carrying out the clearing of all priority sidewalks following this (a period of 2.5 months) was \$14,150 or \$0.33 per foot for the balance of the winter season. It is noted that this was exclusive of sidewalks fronting on Queen/Picton businesses. The contractor's charges included \$4,800.00 per month for the rental of a trackless sidewalk snow plow and \$38.00 per hour for an operator and fuel.

The balance of the municipal sidewalks (22.6 km) were still subject to the by-law. By-law enforcement reacted on a complaint basis.

The options for sidewalk snow clearing are:

Town assumes responsibility for priority sidewalks only* (estimated cost \$23,700)

Town assumes responsibility for all sidewalks* (estimated cost \$32,800)

Adjacent property owner maintains responsibility for all sidewalks. (100% recoverable)

* Except those sidewalks which front Queen/Picton businesses.

The cost per foot of sidewalk cleared will vary depending on the option chosen. Based on our experience it is estimated that, for the same number of snow events, the unit cost of providing the service to all sidewalks (Option 2) would be lowest and most cost effective and could be accomplished within the constraints of the existing policy. This is estimated to cost \$12,300 for the balance of 2001.

SUB-COMMITTEE REVIEW

Pursuant to direction given by Council on January 29, 2001, Alderman D. Dick called a meeting on Wednesday, October 10, 2001 to review sidewalk snow clearing. The meeting was attended by Alderman D. Lepp, the Chief Administrative Officer and the Director of Public Works. The Aldermen agreed that all sidewalks save and except those on Queen/Picton Street in front of the businesses should be cleared by the Town. In addition they were of the opinion that the service areas with sidewalks should be broken down into a number of snow clearing contracts which will ensure that priority sidewalks can be dealt with simultaneously. It was their opinion that a 25 mm (1 inch) accumulation of snow and ice would be the desired threshold to trigger its removal.

A second meeting of the Sub-committee was held on October 18, 2001. In attendance were Alderman D. Dick, Alderman D. Lepp, Alderman R. Howse, the Deputy Director and Director of Public Works. Public Works staff were successful in contacting 6 sidewalk snow removal contractors (4 local, 2 out of town) to determine their interest in carrying out this work. The following comments/observations were noted:

All of the contractors thought that walk behind snow blowers would not be suitable for the volume of work: the rate of removal would be slow (particularly if there is a large snowfall) and the cost extremely high. Most blowers are less than 36" wide and would require two passes to adequately clear the sidewalk.

Most contractors respond to a 2 inch (50 mm) accumulation of snow.

The contractors prefer to be paid by the hour. If not by the hour, they would want to be compensated depending on the snow accumulation.

Contractors would be willing to purchase specialized sidewalk snow removal equipment provided that they are guaranteed a minimum 3 year contract to justify the investment.

A survey of other municipal jurisdictions in Ontario and Manitoba found that most allow accumulations from 50 mm (2 inches) to 80 mm (3 inches) before responding to a snow event, and that the time allowed to complete the operation varies from 12 hours to 72 hours following the end of a storm depending on the classification of the sidewalk.

In retrospect, the Sub-Committee members were in agreement with staff that, based on the findings, the service levels should remain as per the current policy i.e. accumulation of 75 mm and 12 hours to clear.

Staff further advised on the possibility of a "lease to purchase" option for renting a trackless machine with V plow attachment similar to the one used by the Town's contractor last winter. However, the number of operating hours would be too low to justify an outright purchase at this time. This machine can be equipped with other attachments including mower, snow blower and broom. The Sub-committee members encouraged staff to explore the feasibility of utilizing the tractor for other purposes to augment the snow clearing functions. In the meantime, it was concluded that the Town should tender for the lease of the equipment with an option to purchase.

CONCLUSIONS

The advantage of the Town carrying out this activity is to ensure that all sidewalks are passable within a reasonable period of time following a winter storm event. It avoids confrontation with abutting property owners who are noncompliant. Further, it removes the burden of responsibility for maintaining sidewalks for others to use. The benefits would accrue to all road users and could be supported by the general tax levy.

RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended

That a draft by-law amending By-law No. 115-71 to apply only to Queen Street/Picton Street from Gate Street to Wellington Street be prepared for consideration by Council.

That Policy PDS-BLE-003A be amended to delete policy statement 3 and to make reference to the amended by-law.

That draft Policy PW-RDS-016 as appended to Report PW-01-067 be approved.

That the Public Works Department carry out sidewalk snow clearing to include all sidewalks save and except Queen Street/Picton Street from Gate Street to Wellington Street in accordance with the revised snow clearing policy for the 2001/2002 winter season.

That the Public Works Department tender for lease with an option to purchase a sidewalk tractor with V-plow for use in sidewalk snow clearing.

That for the balance of 2001, the funding for sidewalk snow clearing be charged to contingency reserves.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lew Holloway
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

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