
Submitted on: June 15, 2007
Report: PW-07-043

Report To: Public Works Advisory Committee
Subject: Sidewalk Snow Clearing Policy

ORIGIN

Since the 2001-2002 winter season, the Town has assumed responsibility for clearing sidewalks in accordance with Town Policy PW-RDS-016 (see copy attached). The policy specifically sets priorities and excludes the section of Queen-Picton Street from Gate Street to Wellington Street, where it is the responsibility of the abutting property owners per By-law 115-71. In addition, the Town's policy does not provide for ice control on sidewalks. This report is intended to address both matters.

DISCUSSION

The Town has seen a significant increase in the length of sidewalk from 36 km. in 2001 to 50 km. today. The Town has only one Trackless sidewalk plow in its fleet and which was purchased in 2002. In order to meet the service level requirements stated in the policy, staff have recommended the purchase of a second Trackless with plow attachment in 2009 at an estimated cost of \$90,000 (see report PW-07-007).

Queen Street - Snow Clearing

It is understood that the downtown merchants are requesting that the same level of service be received from the Town as is provided the rest of the community. The question is why is this different? This decision was made by a sub-Committee of Council in 2001, at which time it was considered that the ability to effectively clear the areas in front of shops was made difficult by the breadth of the sidewalk, paved boulevards and minimal clearance between the store front and sidewalk. Another aspect was the timing of the work to satisfy merchants needs for store opening.

The Roads Supervisor advises that last season, the sidewalks were plowed 26 times. With the wide sidewalks on Queen Street, one pass would not be sufficient. A rough estimate would be 1.5 hours to plow the Queen Street walks with a machine similar to the Town's Trackless. It is clear that the Town cannot complete this work and maintain the required level of service in the rest of the Town. Likely, any contractor would charge a minimum, probably 4 hours (as they would have to float in a machine). The only current available contractor, with a Trackless, who previously provided this service to the Town, and currently has a contract with the Town of Fort Erie. He charges an hourly rate of \$90.00 and has a contract guarantee of 100 hours. This contractor has advised that he is getting out of the business as the machine is in need of repairs and it is not profitable to either do the repairs or to buy another machine.

Based on last year's experience and the rate quoted above the charges would be \$9,360.00. This would be plowing only with no de-icing application. The current annual budget for sidewalk snow clearing is \$18,000.

Sidewalk sanding/salting

Staff have contacted other area municipalities with regard to their procedures in respect of sanding. The Town of Grimsby has two Trackless machines equipped with material spreaders. They plow all sidewalks and apply a sand/salt mix (20 to 25% salt) to all sidewalks. In addition, there is another employee who is part of the sidewalk crew whose job it is to refill the hoppers along the plow routes and has a snowblower for the areas that the sidewalk plow cannot clear. The Town of Fort Erie have one Trackless, one Bobcat (skid steer) and one contractor with a Trackless (mentioned above). They plow at 75 mm depth accumulation and have a 24 hour window to complete the routes. They use a sand/salt mix which is applied only at crosswalks.

Some other information gleaned from the contacts was that the City of St. Catharines has four Trackless machines and applies salt only in front of City-owned properties. It was also mentioned that the City of Toronto uses a benchmark of 40 km. of sidewalk per plow.

ANALYSIS

The suggestion to include Queen/Picton Street would increase the budget for sidewalk snow clearing by over 50% based on the current budget estimates. It would still be necessary for merchants to clear their store entrances and improved boulevard areas (paving stones) and there is the likelihood that some complaints would arise due to timing and "plowing-in" of some entranceways.

Applying a sand/salt mix would entail more resources: staffing, equipment, material purchase and storage. The available material hoppers are not large and would require re-filling along the route. It would not be feasible for the unit to drive back to the yard to re-fill if current schedules (service levels) are to be maintained. The issue of using salt is a contentious one and would require further consideration. It would be difficult to assess the costs of adding sand/salt to the budget. The benchmark given by Toronto suggests that we have reached the limit of what one machine can plow in a reasonable amount of time. The addition of spreading to the plowing would only add time to the plow route. This would mean the purchase of an additional machine along with additional staffing costs. It would be safe to say that the present budget would be at least double with the addition of sanding/salting.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

If the Town were to embark on either program for the Winter of 2007-2008, it would be necessary to immediately purchase an additional sidewalk plow and hire at least one more employee for the coming season. Under the present circumstances, the Town has not seen a significant increase in the number of claims made by pedestrians for falls due to winter conditions. The Town is providing an enhanced service at a reasonable cost, as compared with many of its neighbouring municipalities, which requires all abutting property owners to clear the municipal sidewalk in front of their land. By raising the level of service, this will elevate the expectations and increase the liability to the Town. The present policy and by-law would appear to provide adequate protection. If the circumstances should change, Council may wish to revisit these matters.

RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended

That Council support the current Policy PW-RDS-016 with respect to the Removal of Snow & Ice

From Sidewalks.

Respectfully submitted,

E.J. Kuczera, M.Sc. P.Eng. Lew Holloway
Director of Public Works Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

First Capital of Upper Canada - 1792

**COTW Amendments
for PW-07-043 - Sidewalk Snow Clearing Policy**

Enter your Amendment(s) here:

Moved by Councillor D. Dick that the recommendation contained in report PW-07-043 be amended to read:

That Policy PW-RDS-016 be amended by removing the word "Ice" from the Policy Title "Removal of Snow & Ice from Sidewalks" and the word "Ice" be removed from the Purpose statement, and that Council support, as amended, the current Policy PW-RDS-016, with respect to the Removal of Snow from Sidewalks. CARRIED.