

City Council**Notice of Motion**

MM21.22	ACTION			Ward:All
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Placement of Hydro poles along City sidewalks - by Councillor Cesar Palacio, seconded by Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

** This Motion is subject to referral to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Cesar Palacio, seconded by Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, recommends that:

1. City Council request the General Manager, Transportation Services, in consultation with Toronto Hydro, to report back to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee in the first quarter of 2017, on the placement of existing utility pole infrastructure that is resulting in health, safety and accessibility problems for those members of the public that are physically disabled and require mobility devices, and to ensure there is full compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act when utility poles are installed.
2. City Council request the General Manager of Transportation Services, in consultation with Toronto Hydro and the Disability, Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, to develop a framework to review utility pole locations that are resulting in adverse impacts for the physically disabled and to report back with potential alternatives.

Summary

With thousands of kilometres of sidewalks in the City of Toronto, many Members of Toronto City Council receive complaints about sidewalk obstructions from the public. Fixed objects such as postal boxes, benches, transit shelters, sign posts, water valves and advertising racks can often be easily moved or relocated to more pedestrian friendly locations. In some cases, sign posts can be mounted on a nearby utility pole. Sidewalks promote safety, accessibility and walkability. Moreover, sidewalks are essential infrastructure that must provide universal accessibility, regardless of ability level, including residents or visitors with mobility challenges and those with limited sensory or cognitive limitations.

Sidewalks are often treated as a convenient place for City divisions to install a wide variety of street furniture, but such obstructions can be highly detrimental to pedestrians trying to use the sidewalk for its intended purpose. This results in every obstruction becoming a pinch point, where pedestrians must walk single file, or wait for someone to pass through from the other direction.

Poorly positioned hydro poles are causing accessibility problems for Torontonians, specifically those with wheelchairs, mobility devices, the blind, mothers with strollers and seniors walking with canes. The problem is that Toronto Hydro has placed poles very deep into the sidewalk right-of-way, all the while creating a very narrow space for pedestrians to maneuver safely. People with disabilities have the right to fully accessible sidewalks. Toronto Hydro needs to be a partner by alleviating pedestrian safety concerns and not burden the public further with such obstacles.

It is also worth noting that infrastructure has a limited life span, which means poorly located hydro poles will eventually need to be replaced and this creates an opportunity to put the replacements along a green boulevard or behind the sidewalks that will help improve safety for pedestrians. Having said that, by working collectively we can help ensure our sidewalks are free of obstructions and more easily accessible for all Torontonians.

The City of Toronto's Transportation Services, Pedestrian Projects Unit adheres to guidelines stipulated under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, requiring that public sidewalks be accessible, which means there must be a minimum clear width to get around any obstruction set at 1.5 metres. The City of Toronto's minimum accessibility standard = 1.7 metres (currently being upgraded to 1.8 metres).

In addition to these minimum requirements, Pedestrian Projects requires additional pedestrian clearway widths (clear, straight and unencumbered by poles, etc.) where there are arterial or collector roads (minimum = 2.1 metres) and more in areas of high pedestrian traffic where people are in danger of stepping off the curb.

The City of Toronto's Streets B-law does speak about the need to have a setback from the curb face of at least 0.5 metres in order to prevent poles being clipped by driver mirrors, snow removal equipment, etc. In older parts of the City with limited sidewalk space, the General Manager of Transportation has been delegated the ability to reduce this setback for hydro poles or other key elements in order to ensure full accessibility.

The City of Toronto supports the goals of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and has established policies, practices and procedures which are consistent with the accessibility standards established under the Act. The overall goal is for the City to align with the Province's Goal to become fully accessible as part of "The Path to 2025" that ensures we all remain on track to creating an accessible province in the decade ahead.

An additional challenge to Transportation Services includes the new replacement hydro poles being much wider than their predecessors with some also not being completely flush with the sidewalk (with protruding collars with bolts at the surface level) presenting an additional impediment to mobility for those members of the public coping with physical disabilities.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM21.22

Photographs of Hydro Poles Obstructing Sidewalks

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-96919.pdf>