

## **Clearing the Path towards a Safe and Accessible Winter**

**Date:** December 14, 2020

**To:** Toronto and East York Community Council

**From:** Director, Operations and Maintenance, Transportation Services

**Wards:** Ward 4: Parkdale-High Park, Ward 9: Davenport, Ward 10: Spadina-Fort York, Ward 11: University-Rosedale, Ward 13: Toronto Centre, Ward 14: Toronto-Danforth, Ward 19: Beaches-East York

### **SUMMARY**

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The purpose of this report is to provide information requested by City Council regarding the streets that will receive sidewalk snow clearing during the 2020-2021 winter season and a path forward for a full harmonization of the 2021-2022 winter season.

Transportation Services mechanically clears snow from sidewalks in most areas of the City, with the exception of areas where a snow plow is unable to navigate the space to physically clear the snow. The City has about 7,029 km of sidewalks and the City mechanically clears approximately 5,785 km (about 82%) of these sidewalks.

In February 2020, Transportation Services began testing eight new pieces of equipment in selected areas across the city where existing contractor's sidewalk plows cannot operate. The trial will continue throughout this upcoming winter season with an additional machine (bringing the total to nine sidewalk plows) that will operate along 230 km of sidewalks that have not previously had mechanical sidewalk snow clearing services. The sidewalks included in the trial were selected by prioritizing locations that serve the seniors and residents with disabilities program. Staff will use information from the trial and report back in spring 2021 on the operational and financial considerations that would be required to expand mechanical sidewalk plowing on a permanent basis in the future.

Other winter maintenance enhancements this winter season will include expanded multi-purpose trail snow and ice clearance in collaboration with Parks, Forestry and Recreation; enhanced inspections, on a complaint basis, to address locations where sidewalks are not cleared by the adjacent property owner within the time specified in the bylaw; and, continuance of the education campaign launched in 2019.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Director, Operations and Maintenance recommends that:

1. Toronto and East York Community Council receive this report for information.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on November 25 and 26, 2020, City Council requested the General Manager, Transportation Services to report to the December 2, 2020 meeting of the Toronto and East York Community Council with the streets that will receive sidewalk snow clearing during the 2020-2021 winter season and a path forward for a full harmonization of the 2021-2022 winter season for City Council's consideration.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.IE17.7>

## COMMENTS

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### Current Toronto Mechanical Sidewalk Clearing Program

Transportation Services mechanically clears snow from sidewalks in most areas of the City, but only where a contractor's snow plow is able to navigate the space to physically clear the snow. Sidewalk clearing services are provided on about 5,785 km (about 82%) of the total 7,029 km of sidewalks by the City's contractors. Attachment 1 includes a map of the sidewalk snow clearing services provided in Toronto. Transportation Services oversees 15 contracts that provide snow clearing and salting of sidewalks, bus stops, pedestrian crosswalks and signalized intersections, with 329 pieces of equipment in total (92 bus stop units and 237 sidewalk machines). For the 2019-2020 winter season the Sidewalk and Transit Snow Clearing Level of Service was updated to reflect a 2 cm activation of operation for sidewalks with both high and low pedestrian volumes. High pedestrian volume sidewalks are cleared first after which crews are deployed to clear low pedestrian volume sidewalks. It takes approximately 13 hours to accomplish one full round of sidewalk snow clearing. Additionally, Transportation Services clears walkways connecting a road to a road that include steps that cannot be completed by mechanical clearing.

The City does not provide mechanical sidewalk clearing if:

- The sidewalk is too narrow for current equipment or contains obstacles, such as utility poles;
- There is limited space to store the snow cleared from the sidewalk (such as the presence of parked cars immediately adjacent to the sidewalk occupying the space where the snow could be stored); or
- There are encroachments from private properties (such as retaining walls or fences) that make the sidewalk unable to be navigated by the plows or that could be damaged by sidewalk plows.

In the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 winter seasons, there were 31 and 24 winter events, respectively, that necessitated sidewalk clearing.

### **Current Seniors Sidewalk Snow Removal Program**

The City has a sidewalk snow clearing program for seniors and persons with disabilities residing in areas where mechanical snow clearing is not possible, thus City staff clear their sidewalks manually. This service is provided free of charge and an application form must be completed and submitted accompanied with a doctor's certificate to be eligible for the program. There are currently 7,703 addresses enrolled in the program. A map of the locations is shown in Attachment 2.

The current eligibility requirements are as follows:

- Resident owner or tenant/occupant of a one or two family dwelling;
- Over the age of 65 (proof of age is required i.e. photocopy of a driver's licence, health card or passport); or,
- Under the age of 65 and have a physical disability with proof of disability required (i.e. photocopy of accessible parking permit or doctor's note).

In order to be eligible to receive manual sidewalk clearing services, residents must also confirm that there are no relatives under the age of 65 that reside at their address unless the relative(s) has a physical disability.

Earlier this year City staff updated the program list to confirm as to whether residents are either still residing at the listed address, if they are not deceased, if there are any changes in their household with relatives under 65 residing in the home, or whether they still wish to be a part of the program.

### **Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Mechanical Sidewalk Clearing Trial**

In February 2020, Transportation Services conducted a trial using new technology and smaller plows, to test the feasibility and effectiveness of eight new machines to clear narrower sidewalks. The trial included sidewalks in Wards 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14 and 19, Attachment 3 includes a map of the trial locations. Due to low level of winter activity events in 2020 that triggered sidewalk clearing, it was not feasible to fully deploy the trial in a manner that would best assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of the sidewalk machines. Transportation Services will continue the trial for the 2020-2021 winter season and have included an additional machine, bringing the total to nine trial

machines. The sidewalks included in the trial were selected by prioritizing locations that serve the seniors and residents with disabilities program. Trial details are as follows:

- 9 sidewalk machines
- 230 km of sidewalks included, increasing the total amount of sidewalks receiving mechanical clearing to approximately 6,015 km (85.5% of all sidewalks in Toronto)
- Service provided to 1,731 homes
- Each plow is assigned two beats ranging from 9-15 km of sidewalk each
- It takes two days to complete one full round of snow clearing on the trial sidewalks as each plow will complete one route per day
- Routes were designed to capture the most locations on the Senior or Persons with Disabilities Sidewalk Clearing Program in which the sidewalks are at least 1.5m in width
- The routes cover a large enough area to effectively evaluate the equipment
- Transportation Services will continue manually clearing sidewalks for seniors or persons with disabilities whose households are not included in this trial
- The routes are posted at the City of Toronto winter web page at [www.toronto.ca/snow](http://www.toronto.ca/snow). The routes, along with background information, were provided to 311

In addition to evaluating new equipment, staff are also working to complete a full inventory of sidewalk widths, obstructions and other obstacles, such as utility poles, planters, retaining walls and on-street parking adjacent to the sidewalk. This information will help determine the feasibility of expanding the sidewalk clearing program to other areas of the city.

### **Current Sidewalk Maintenance By-law and Enforcement Procedures**

Chapter 719, Snow and Ice Removal of the Toronto Municipal Code provides the framework for the clearing of snow and ice from sidewalks. Every owner or occupant of a building must clear the sidewalk abutting their property within 12 hours after snowfall has ceased. The bylaw also specifies that the sidewalk must be maintained such that it is not slippery. These rules do not apply for areas where the City has undertaken the responsibility to clear the snow from sidewalks.

Enforcement of this by-law is undertaken on a complaint basis. If a complaint is received, a Transportation Standards Officer is dispatched to investigate the complaint and if warranted, homeowners/occupants are provided with a notice of violation by the officer. Once onsite, the officer also inspects other properties on the block to ensure compliance with the snow and ice removal requirements.

During the 2019-2020 winter season, approximately 3,000 complaints were received resulting in 630 notices and 5 charges. Operations and Maintenance staff arranged for the clearing of 8 sidewalks. The cost of the clearing is charged to the property owner/occupant.

In addition, as per the City's Snow and Ice Clearing Bylaw, the fine for not clearing snow from public property is \$105 plus a \$30 surcharge.

### **Enhanced Inspection**

For the 2020-2021 winter season, staff are proposing an enhanced inspection approach in order to facilitate clear sidewalks to create better opportunities for social distancing required for COVID-19. Transportation Services will repurpose additional Transportation Standards Officers (approximately 10) during winter events to provide improved response times for complaints.

In situations where inspections are required, Chapter 719 does not require any notice be provided to residents, however in staff's experience, compliance rates tend to be high after a notice is left with the property.

### **Enhancing Winter Mobility through Services on the Finch and Gattineau Trails**

Transportation Services will assist in the maintenance of the Finch Corridor and Gattineau Trails.

The Finch Corridor Trail consists of over 19 km of paved trail which travels from Norfinch Drive in Etobicoke York to Middlefield Road in Scarborough. The trail has intermittent breaks in between but these usually continued through the city streets to allow for a continuous connection. It is located in the high voltage towers right of way that travels along the northern end of the City. The Gattineau Trail consists of 19 km of paved pathways also located in the Hydro High voltage Right of Way running from Victoria Park East to Military Trail.

This winter, the Finch and Gattineau trails will be plowed and salted as part of staff's everyday winter maintenance responsibilities. A 3 km portion of the Finch Trail, from Willowdale Avenue to Pineway Boulevard, will not be maintained as it has been deemed protected land by Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority.

### **Education Campaign**

Last year's winter services public education campaign will return for the 2020-21 season and will include some enhancements. This season's campaign will again include various multimedia touchpoints (print, digital, radio) as well as a direct mail piece to all homes and apartments in Toronto. The campaign will be in market from mid-December 2020 to mid-February 2021.

The objective is to build on the broad public awareness created last season about how and when the City of Toronto delivers its winter services program (snow and ice clearing) including approved levels of service. In addition, it will reinforce to residents that they have an important role to play in keeping roads and sidewalks safe and passable for everyone in their community.

## Next Steps

Upon completion of the sidewalk trial, Transportation Services will report back to Infrastructure and Environment Committee in spring 2021 on the results of the trial program and options for further consideration. In addition, Transportation Services will coordinate with Parks, Forestry and Recreation and provide recommendations on enhanced levels of winter maintenance service within parks in the City.

## CONTACT

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## SIGNATURE

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Vincent Sferrazza  
Director, Operations and Maintenance  
Transportation Services

## ATTACHMENTS

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Attachment 1: Mechanical Sidewalk Clearing  
Attachment 2: Senior Sidewalk Removal Service – 2020 to 2021  
Attachment 3: Seniors Mechanical Sidewalk Trial Locations – Beats 1 – 9