



To: Chair McKelvie and members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee
From: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)
Date: Jan. 10, 2022
Re: IE27.9 — Revisiting Strategy to Maintain Public Walkways in a State of Good Repair

Walk Toronto is a grassroots pedestrian advocacy group that works with various levels of government, community groups and citizens to improve walking conditions and safety in Toronto.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF REPORT

Walk Toronto is pleased that Transportation Services staff have outlined the most important facets of a strategy to maintain public walkways in a state of good repair. This includes the recognition that an efficient, fine-grained walking network relies on well-maintained neighbourhood walkways, shortcuts and mid-block connections. **We recommend that staff proceed with their proposed comprehensive feasibility study on developing a framework that includes an annual plan for inspecting, field verifying, and maintaining public walkways in a state of good repair — reporting back in 2023, with provisions being made in the 2024 operating and capital budget cycle.**

MAINTENANCE STANDARDS

Regular maintenance during the warmer seasons is fairly straightforward. However, improving levels of service for seasonal winter maintenance presents various challenges. Climate change has heightened the freeze/thaw cycle. A walkway may be cleared satisfactorily one day; but subsequent thawing and freezing can leave a thin layer of ice that is treacherous for pedestrians. In order to deal with this effect, maintenance crews sometimes lay down excessive amounts of salt. The environmental dangers of salt use have been well-publicized. Another negative impact can actually be counterproductive: large accumulations of dried salt can be almost as slippery as the ice it melts, acting like ball bearings. We urge the City to look into replacements for salt that are effective, but non-slippery and environmentally benign.

PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLICLY-ACCESSIBLE SPACES

Walkways can exist on land owned by various City divisions and other public entities such as school boards. Staff recognize that this makes the task of drawing up an inventory and creating a maintenance strategy complex. Also, it should be pointed out that many walkways have been built on privately owned publicly-accessible spaces (“POPS”). In 2014, over 100 POPS existed, and their number has increased since then due to the intensive construction of condominium towers. Many POPS incorporate walkways that provide access to gardens and parkettes. Walk Toronto suggests that POPS be added to the City’s walkway inventory.

Private owners typically are responsible for the maintenance of POPS. General guidelines were set out by the City of Toronto in 2014. Also, we assume that property-specific details have been negotiated as part of individual development applications, with maintenance requirements being specified in agreements registered on title to a property on which a POPS is built. Several of the concerns that Walk Toronto considers important are adequate snow clearing, public access that is not impeded by encroachments and obstructions, and the presence of conspicuous signs indicating the location of a POPS and the public's right to use it. We would like to see City of Toronto staff do inspections and enforce remedies for non-compliant POPS.

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