



OLIVIA CHOW MAYOR

February 25, 2025

Review of Toronto's Winter Maintenance Program

Dear Members of the Executive Committee

Like many Torontonians, I am frustrated with the City of Toronto's response to the recent snow storms. All Toronto residents, including seniors, people with mobility issues and parents with strollers, were left to contend with an inadequate and slow city response. It can't continue like this. We know these storms happen every couple of years and yet each time our city is paralyzed by a big snowfall.

Last week, I had the opportunity to tour snow removal operations. It is painstaking work and the people who do it deserve to have the proper equipment and logistical plans to succeed. I am confident that through my recommendations in this letter, we will improve Toronto's winter maintenance program both for the residents who rely on it and the people who deliver it.

In addition to my recommendations, I have also asked City Manager Paul Johnson to immediately review options to deploy additional City staff from other departments to clear and remove snow, as well as support flood prevention efforts, while also ensuring other essential City services continue their operations.

I request that the Executive Committee recommend that:

1. City Council request the City Manager to conduct a full review of winter maintenance operations to determine how to immediately optimize the available city resources and whether there are opportunities to improve the City's management of winter maintenance contracts with private contractors.
2. City Council request the City Manager to investigate the gap between City reports that 100 percent of sidewalks were cleared of snow at least once and the reality of residents who can see no plow had visited a given stretch of sidewalk.

3. City Council request the City Manager to determine whether the private winter maintenance contractors have upheld their obligations under their contracts and, if not, pursue all options to hold the contractors accountable and recover public funds where appropriate.
4. City Council request the City Manager to evaluate all options to improve winter maintenance work, including renegotiating or breaking existing contracts, improving maintenance of the City-owned fleet of winter equipment, purchasing improved winter equipment that can handle heavier snow falls (particularly for sidewalks), developing contingency plans to redeploy more City staff to winter maintenance work when a Snow Condition is declared, and creating a policy to determine when snow removal should be undertaken.
5. City Council request the City Manager to report to the Executive Committee on the work outlined in Recommendations 1 to 4 above and City Council request the City Manager, as part of the 2026 budget process, to report on any recommendations that have a financial impact on the Transportation Services Operating Budget.
6. City Council request the Auditor General to consider adding, as part of the Auditor General's 2025 Work Plan, an audit of the following:
 - a. the City of Toronto's handling of the February 2025 major winter storm, taking into consideration prior audits of this winter service contract, and provide recommendations for improving winter maintenance during significant winter storms;
 - b. whether previous Auditor General recommendations related to winter maintenance operations were enacted by City management ahead of the February 2025 winter storm;
 - c. the City's snow removal system to determine whether it was activated in a timely and effective manner;
 - d. the City's sidewalk plow fleet to determine whether they are the optimal equipment based on local winter conditions, whether the plows are maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommended practices, the average percentage of the plow fleet that is in service throughout a major snow event, and whether all warranties from the

manufacturer have been leveraged to limit the City's cost of sidewalk plow maintenance; and

e. the 2021 Negotiated Request for Proposals awards that resulted in the current suite of winter maintenance contracts to determine if they were awarded in a fair and competitive manner;

and recommend improvements to the City's winter maintenance contracts.

I look forward to our discussion on winter maintenance at our next Executive Committee meeting, including any further ideas you may have to improve Toronto's responses to major storms.

Sincerely,

Olivia Chow
Mayor