



Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Letter to IEC

Corporate landowners should have to clear their sidewalks again

RECOMMENDATION

That Infrastructure and Environment Committee direct the General Manager, Transportation Services, in consultation with the Executive Director, Municipal Licencing and Standards, to report back to IEC in Q3 2025 with a detailed plan to restore the responsibility of corporate property owners to promptly clear snow and ice from sidewalks abutting their property.

SUMMARY

Until 2022, corporate property owners in Toronto were obliged to promptly clear snow and ice from sidewalks abutting their property, and most did so.

In 2022, the City of Toronto expanded its mechanical sidewalk snow plowing program city wide. As a perhaps unintended side effect, 719-2 of the Municipal Code relieved all private property owners of their long-standing obligation to clear snow from sidewalks abutting their property, except when snowfall is <2 cm. Many individual property owners are incapable of clearing the snow on their sidewalks, but this does not apply to the wealthy corporations who own multi-million dollar multi-unit buildings. This month, many such corporations left their sidewalks impassible, even on major streets, seriously inconveniencing residents and delaying city efforts to clear other sidewalks.

As shown in the recent storm, it is not reasonable for the city to bear the exclusive responsibility to clear all sidewalks, and the city is not able to do so in a reasonable period of time following a heavy snowfall. This creates massive public inconvenience and exposes the city to liability risks.

Instead, corporate property owners can, and should, be required to resume the primary responsibility to clear the snow and ice on the sidewalks abutting their properties, no matter how heavy the snowfall. City crews should provide a backup service only.

The requirements and responsibilities for snow and ice removal is regulated through Chapter 719 of the Toronto Municipal Code. Under this bylaw,

§ 719-2. Time limit for removal of snow and ice from sidewalks.

A. Every owner or occupant of any building must, within 12 hours after any fall of snow, rain or hail has ceased, clear away and completely remove snow and ice from any sidewalk on any highway in front of, alongside or at the rear of the building.

B. After the removal of snow and ice, if any portion of the sidewalk becomes slippery from any cause, the owner or occupant must immediately and as often as necessary apply to the sidewalk ashes, sand, salt or some other suitable material so as to completely cover the slippery surface.

C. Subsection A does not apply to an owner or an occupant of a building where, pursuant to City of Toronto policy, the City of Toronto has undertaken the responsibility to clear away and completely remove snow and ice from the sidewalk on the highway in front of, alongside or at the rear of the building at that location.

Because the City's mechanical sidewalk snow plowing program now extends city wide, 719-2C has been interpreted to mean that private owners have no snow/ ice removal obligation except when there is a snowfall of less than 2cm (the city's threshold for sidewalk snow plowing). It is within the city's power to limit subsection C to individuals who deserve to be free of snow-clearing obligations, and we should do.

Councillor Dianne Saxe

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