

To: Community and Operations Services Committee

From: Tracy Adams, Chief Administrative Officer,
Office of the C.A.O.

Report Number: CO-23-56

Date of Report: October 18, 2023

Date of Meeting: October 23, 2023

Subject: Winter Maintenance Operations and Customer Feedback
Implementation

Ward: All Wards

File: 03-05

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Provide an update on the annual winter maintenance program; and,
2. Address the following City Council Direction, CNCL-23-38 dated April 3, 2023, concerning “Snow Clearing Services” in preparation for the 2023-2024 Winter Season:

“Whereas the City is committed to providing snow clearing services that make the City safe; and,

Whereas this important municipal service is to be delivered in an effective and efficient manner with service standards appropriately set, monitored and delivered upon; and,

Whereas the City has operational service staff who are dedicated to continuing to find ways for improvement;

Now therefore in preparation for the 2023-2024 winter season Council directs staff to:

1. formulate a plan to initiate regular resident feedback surveys that will gather customer feedback and satisfaction data over the period of winter maintenance operations; and,

2. review what adjustments to the City's snow clearing response plans can be made during heavy snow events when the expected snowfall exceeds 6 inches (15 cm) or more in 12 hours or 8 inches (20 cm) or more in 24 hours;

and report back to Committee on their finding before the 2024 budget deliberations."

2.0 Recommendation

That the Community and Operations Services Committee recommend to City Council:

1. That improvements outlined in Report CO-23-56 dated October 18, 2023, concerning the Winter Maintenance Operations and Customer Feedback Implementation, be endorsed; and,
2. That staff report back at the end of the winter season on the findings of the customer service satisfaction communications and any proposed winter maintenance operations changes including City Quality Standards and potential budget implications.

3.0 Executive Summary

Not applicable

4.0 Input From Other Sources

- Corporate Communications
- Legal Services
- Municipal Law Enforcement and Licensing Services
- Purchasing Services
- Service Oshawa

5.0 Analysis

5.1 Winter Storm Response Activities

The City's response to winter storm events is multi-faceted requiring a team approach to address the various factors that may arise during and after the event. The actions and maintenance activities implemented are based on the type of weather event and the duration of the storm.

5.1.1 Winter Maintenance Operations Activities and Responsibilities

The City of Oshawa is responsible for various winter maintenance operations activities in response to snow and ice accumulation events. This is undertaken by both City and contracted resources in accordance with the Minimum Maintenance Standards (M.M.S.) for municipal roads established under Provincial legislation, [O. Reg. 239/02](#) and Council approved Quality Standards. The Council approved City Quality Standards guide the City's

snow clearing priorities and commencement of the various winter maintenance operations activities based on the infrastructure. The City Quality Standards are highlighted below.

Table 1: Priority Infrastructure (governed by City Quality Standards which refer to the Provincial M.M.S.):

Infrastructure and Priority	Time for Completion (after storm has ended)*	City Quality Standard Objective
Primary: Arterial Roads	6 hours (Class 2 M.M.S.)	Plowed full width to bare pavement
Primary: Collector Roads	12 hours (Class 3 M.M.S.)	Plowed full width to bare pavement
Secondary: Residential Streets	16 hours (Class 4 M.M.S.)	Centre bare (5.5 m) pavement
Secondary: Public Sidewalks, S.C.A.P. & school crosswalks	No later than 5:00 pm the second day after the end of the storm, as specified in the City Quality Standards (M.M.S. is 48 hours) S.C.A.P. windrows that exceed 20 cm	Cleared

*M.M.S. standards are extended if the municipality has declared a “significant weather event”. The timing for completion in accordance with M.M.S. resumes once the “significant weather event” is declared over.

Tertiary Infrastructure (governed by City Quality Standards, M.M.S. standards do not apply):

- High pedestrian walkways: completion time is the same as sidewalks.
- Recreational Trails: Occurs Monday to Friday during regular operating hours.
- Downtown snow removal: Snowbanks exceed 45 cm in height and 60 cm at the base (consideration is given to events occurring in the downtown or anticipated thaw).

The City’s Winter Maintenance Operations begins mid-November and is in effect until the end of March. During this period, current and forecasted weather is monitored regularly and regular patrolling of City roads and sidewalks are performed in accordance with M.M.S. To determine the most appropriate activity needed to respond to a particular winter condition, regular and ongoing monitoring is conducted of winter conditions including assessing the amount of accumulated snowfall and the prevailing temperatures. Resources are deployed to address the conditions. For example, staff are deployed to salt and plow sidewalks when snowfall accumulation is in excess of 2 cm.

The M.M.S. and City Quality Standards dictate the maximum allowable accumulation of snow before a municipality is required to deploy resources and the timing of completion. Winter maintenance operations activities continue until the snow accumulation objectives are met. For example, it may take multiple rounds to clear a road due to ongoing snowfall. If another storm event occurs before the objectives from the first storm are achieved, the

timing for completion, outlined in Table 1, is determined by the end of the second storm. This allows the City to redeploy resources back to priority areas allowing the standards to be achieved after the completion of the second storm.

Roads Operations leads all winter maintenance operations activities on City roads, sidewalks adjacent to City property, the Snow Clearing Assistance Program (as referenced under Section 5.1.2), walkways through parks and City facilities, multi-use paths and crosswalks, as well as clearing and removing snow in the downtown core including municipal parking lots/garages and on-street parking. Parks Operations is responsible for winter maintenance operations activities associated with facility/park parking lots and recreational trails.

The City is not alone in its response to winter weather events. Other agencies provide winter maintenance operations activities that may not align with the City's service standards. For example, the Region of Durham is responsible for maintaining all Regional Roads and bus stops, and Canada Post maintains the areas around mailboxes.

Private property owners are responsible for winter maintenance of sidewalks (salting and clearing) adjacent to their property including sidewalks adjacent to schools, medical buildings, etc. and must comply with the [Winter Access By-law 93-2009](#), as amended (formerly known as the Snow and Ice By-law). Property owners must clear snow and ice from sidewalks adjacent to their property no later than midnight the day after the snowfall has ended or any other precipitation.

5.1.2 Snow Clearing Assistance Program

The City supports residents 65 years of age or older and persons with a disability through the Snow Clearing Assistance Program ("S.C.A.P."). Community members 65 years of age or older and people with disabilities who have no community members without disabilities under the age of 65 living in the household are eligible to register annually for the program. The S.C.A.P. provides registered community members with assistance in clearing City sidewalks and driveway windrows. The windrow is the pile of snow at the bottom of the driveway after a snowplow clears the street.

Windrow clearing commences when windrows exceed 20 cm (8 in) high. The objective is to complete the S.C.A.P. by midnight the day after the end of the storm. Staff recently undertook a review of the S.C.A.P. program and found the City's eligibility requirements to be consistent among municipal comparators within the Region of Durham; however, the delivery of the programs varied, with some municipalities charging a fee or waiving fees for those in receipt of the Guaranteed Annual Income Supplement.

5.2 Changes to Winter Maintenance Operations Activities

The City typically utilizes a contracted service provider to supplement the City's winter maintenance operations activities. The contractor is to provide continuous availability and supply of 14 combination plow and salt trucks with qualified operators to provide on-demand 24-hour coverage during storm events.

The current contract has ended; therefore, staff issued a request for proposal ("R.F.P.") that permitted bidders to offer different types of winter maintenance equipment to allow for alternative maintenance strategies. Two (2) contractors were awarded, securing 11 graders and loaders with operators. These suppliers will provide one shift snow clearing services to supplement City forces and will not provide salting services. Another R.F.P. has been issued to secure additional road winter maintenance operations services for the shortfall in equipment and staffing. The R.F.P. closes on October 18th. The financial implications of the R.F.P.s. can be accommodated within the approved winter operating budget.

To accommodate any shortfall in contracted services, Operations Services will be increasing the staff complement to 10 temporary employees to support winter operations. These additional resources will provide 24-hour coverage and the flexibility needed to meet M.M.S. provincial regulations while also providing timely services to seniors and other City winter maintenance operations activities. Management met with the CUPE 250 local executive and received support to exceed the cap on temporary labour based on collective agreement restrictions.

Additionally, staff will be implementing alternative winter maintenance strategies to improve efficiencies including adjustments to salting practices, which could result in improved salt management practices and reduction in salt use. Staff will continue to monitor conditions, and public feedback, and adjust the operation as necessary.

With respect to Part 2 of CNCL-23-38, the City's ability to adjust winter maintenance operations activities, based on the size of a storm, is limited due to the lack of available contractors and equipment. In addition, the City's current Quality Standard is to meet the timing outlined in the M.M.S., based on the classification of the road outlined above in Table 1. The operation is not equipped to exceed the City Quality Standards. Additional equipment and/or contractors would be required, which are not available in the current labour market.

During severe storm events the City's priority is meeting the M.M.S and City Quality Standards. The City's ability to adjust winter maintenance operation activities is achieved by shifting priorities away from tertiary winter maintenance operation activities, such as trails, walkways and parking lots, in order to achieve the M.M.S. and complete the S.C.A.P.

Given the operational challenges outlined above, adjustments to the City's winter maintenance operation activities for snow events that exceed 6 inches (15 cm) or more in 12 hours or 8 inches (20 cm) or more in 24 hours, are not recommended at this time. Staff will review the feedback from the customer service communications, identified in section 5.3, to determine if overall changes are needed to the City's winter maintenance operations activities, which could have corresponding budget implications.

5.3 Communications Related to Winter Maintenance Operations Activities

During a storm event, Corporate Communications increases its communications to residents to provide the status of snow clearing operations across the city. Corporate Communications also issues important reminders to residents such as the removal of

parked cars from roadways and a timeline for sidewalk clearing based on by-law requirements.

Additionally, updates on winter storm maintenance activities are available on the City's website through the [Snow Clearing Activity Report](#). The Snow Clearing Activity Report is updated by Operations Services as storm maintenance activities are completed. Staff will be investigating the possibility of using interactive maps to better display winter maintenance operations activities and track winter operations.

5.4 Service Oshawa Winter Storm Response

Service Oshawa operating practices were adjusted at the end of the 2022-2023 winter season to allow for improved customer service during significant winter storm events. The operating hours of Service Oshawa will be extended when deemed necessary based on the winter storm conditions, this includes being available after regular operating hours including weekends and holidays. Expanding Service Oshawa hours during winter storm events will assist residents in being able to receive updates regarding the status of clearing operations. Information provided to residents is based on input from Operations Services.

In addition, the telephone Interactive Voice Recognition ("IVR") will be updated, when appropriate, to inform residents of the clearing status and to direct them to the online Snow Clearing Activity Report or provide other pertinent information. During an active winter storm event, Service Oshawa Customer Service representatives encourage residents to monitor the Snow Clearing Activity Report on the City's website. Additionally, efforts will be made to improve the email response during snow storms. However, the type and duration of a storm event can have a significant impact on the volume of calls and live chats that Service Oshawa receives and may have an impact on the timeliness of responding to customer inquiries.

Once the storm event is declared over, and the City's snow maintenance activities have been completed, and the time has lapsed for sidewalks to be cleared as per the Winter Access By-law 92-2009, as amended, service requests are then sent to either Operations Services or By-law Enforcement for appropriate follow up.

5.5 Winter Access By-law Enforcement

Municipal Law Enforcement ("M.L.E.") supports winter maintenance operations activities by conducting proactive enforcement of the seasonal parking restrictions from December 1 to April 1 between the hours of 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. During winter storm activities, M.L.E. staff accompany plow operators, by utilizing GPS/AVL systems, to conduct real-time parking enforcement. M.L.E. also respond to sidewalk snow clearing complaints under the Winter Access By-law, 92-2009, as amended.

In 2022, Oshawa City Council endorsed discontinuing the educational-focused enforcement approach and instead adopted a penalties-based enforcement approach for property owners in violation of the Winter Access By-law, 92-2009, as amended. This change eliminates the "warning visit" and allows the immediate issuing of a fine. Penalties are tiered and escalate for repeat offenders. Invoices are also issued to property owners for the cost of clearing the sidewalk.

5.6 Proposed Customer Service Satisfaction Communications

Pursuant to Part 1 of CNCL-23-38, staff will undertake customer service satisfaction communications to gather feedback on the City's winter maintenance operations program over the period of the 2023-2024 winter season. The feedback form will be open from December 1, 2023 to April 1, 2024 and available on Connect Oshawa and in hard copy at Service Oshawa. Feedback received will be reviewed regularly to help inform potential adjustments to winter maintenance operations activities, if necessary, as part of the City's commitment to continuous improvement.

The feedback form will be promoted to community members through various mediums, such as social media, as well as print and digital promotional material.

6.0 Financial Implications

The financial implications associated with the promotion of the winter maintenance operations customer service satisfaction communications is anticipated to be \$4,100. This can be accommodated by the Operations Services Operating budget and will be combined, where possible, with other promotional items such as those undertaken for the seasonal parking restrictions.

Staff will report back at the end of the winter season on the findings of the customer service satisfaction communications and any proposed changes to City Quality Standards that may be required to address the feedback and the corresponding budget implications, if any.

7.0 Relationship to the Oshawa Strategic Plan

This Report responds to the Oshawa Strategic Plan Goals of Accountable Leadership and Economic Prosperity and Financial Stewardship.



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