

BACKGROUNDER
WINTER MAINTENANCE REVIEW:
INTERIM “QUICK HITS”, 2014-2015

Improve Snow Removal and Sidewalk Clearing Standards

- Current sidewalk standards do not serve pedestrians well, particularly during harsh winters. Sidewalks were a major concern for the public last year, and we agree that sidewalk-users (on main arterials and thoroughfares and in the downtown core) should have a more equitable access to sidewalks as road-users have to roads.
- To achieve a higher standard, snow must be removed more frequently, particularly in the downtown core where there is essentially nowhere to “blow back” snow.
- The City will establish annual contracts for hired trucks to participate in enhanced snow removal operations rather than the current sole reliance on City staff for snow removal.
- Furthermore, our equipment must be in good working order and at the ready when it is required to clear sidewalks. KPMG recommend a number of Fleet management solutions to keep vehicles and equipment operational, from inside storage and improved inspections, to better training and improved communications between operators and mechanics. All these recommendations have been accepted and are being implemented this year.
- Presently, the City has 18 operators – six on each of three shifts – dedicated to sidewalks. For the upcoming season, the City will pilot a new 8-person dedicated Sidewalk Crew, working on the dayshift, with a dedicated foreperson. The effectiveness and efficiency of this model will be evaluated throughout the season, including close monitoring of public satisfaction with the new service level.

Reduced Driveway Shoveling

- A significant part of the review conducted by KPMG Consultants is a cross-jurisdictional benchmarking. St. John’s was compared with five other cities: Mount Pearl, Fredericton, Halifax, Quebec City and Saguenay.
- With the exception of Mount Pearl, other cities in the study allow snow-packed conditions on residential streets rather than aiming to achieve bare pavement, which is the current standard in the City of St. John’s.
- Snow-packed conditions potentially reduce driveway shoveling and also operational costs. The consultants included this recommendation as an option for the City to consider.
- This recommendation would mean a reduction in level of service, primarily of residential streets. Minimizing the number of cuts on residential streets, while desirable to reduce multiple accumulations in driveways, is often not possible given the duration and intensity of many winter storms as well as the time required to cover a snow route completely.
- For these reason, the City has rejected this quick hit recommendation for the 2014-2015 season.
- The level of service on residential streets will be maintained at its current level and we will utilize new plowing practices developed through training to minimize the numbers of plow cuts as much as possible consistent with good practice.

Extend Winter Season Hiring and Improve Training

- The current 16-week season exposes the City to excessive risk related to early and late winter weather events when staffing levels are lower than would be advisable for adequate storm response. The late start also leads to exposure to the risk of inadequate orientation and training of both winter operators as well as forepersons.
- Last winter the early onset of severe weather reduced the training time to below acceptable levels. In addition, the winter staff layoff date of March 24 left the City exposed to several weather events with lower than desired staffing levels.
- A minimum winter season termination date of March 31 for 2015 will reduce this risk and fall more in line with surrounding jurisdictions.
- The consultants recommend that the City increase its trainers by three. These trainers will provide both classroom and “on-the-job” training through shadowing and other means at the beginning of the season and all season long, as training issues and needs emerge.
- City staff and forepersons in Roads, Fleet and Supply are critical to our ability to function effectively and efficiently as a team and to keep our roads, sidewalks and pathways open during the winter months.
- We value the experience of our staff and forepersons and want to ensure that knowledge is passed down to new operators, that information is shared and that the team feels supported to try new and potentially more effective ways of delivering quality service.
- With improved service in mind, we will invest in our team.

Winter Parking Ban

- One of a number of other smaller recommendations from the consultant is to consider changing the starting date of the on-street parking ban. We are considering implementing the ban as of the first 10+cm snowfall, and will ask for the public’s opinion on this idea.

Cost Implications

- The quick hits identified for 2014-2015 will cost the City an estimated \$1.65 million
 - Hired trucks, snow removal \$800,000
 - Snow removal, City crews \$250,000
 - Sidewalk Pilot \$225,000
 - Longer winter season \$200,000
 - Additional training \$120,000
 - Inspections/ other \$60,000