

MOTION

7. Including Pedestrians in Vancouver's Snow Protocol and Response

At the Council meeting on February 11, 2020, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on February 12, 2020, in order to hear from speakers.

Moved by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. Keeping our city's streets, sidewalks, and green spaces safe and clean for everyone to enjoy is a City of Vancouver priority, including the clearing of snow from streets and public sidewalks.
2. Ensuring that people of all ages and abilities can access homes, businesses, and facilities in safety and comfort, especially those who are walking, cycling, or taking transit, is a chief goal of the City's Complete Streets Strategy and fundamental to the City's core responsibility of building and maintaining the city's roads, sidewalks, and public spaces, managing how city streets are used, and creating land use and urban design policies.
3. When sidewalks are not cleared during snow and ice events it can negatively and severely impact some of Vancouver's most vulnerable persons, including seniors and persons with disabilities, and can leave them isolated and/or unsafe.
4. Sidewalks that are not cleared of snow and ice often have the greatest negative impact on those who can least afford to stay home, such as hourly and contract workers who either need to walk and/or safely reach transit, which is fundamentally inconsistent with the City's Equity goals.
5. The Climate Emergency Response report approved by Council on April 29, 2019, contains six big moves to reduce Vancouver's carbon pollution, wherein the first two "big moves" are "Walkable complete communities" (*i.e. by 2030, 90% of people live within an easy walk and roll of their daily needs*) and "Safe and convenient active transportation and transit" (*i.e. by 2030, two thirds of trips in Vancouver will be by active transportation and transit*).
6. Transportation decisions in the City of Vancouver generally reflect a "hierarchy of modes" for moving people which prioritize walking as the highest transportation priority, then cycling, then transit, followed by taxi / commercial / shared vehicles, and lastly private automobiles.
7. The responsibility for clearing roads and travelways in the City of Vancouver falls to the Engineering Department and Streets Division. When cold weather hits, the City works to ensure that major routes are safe by salting and brining before any snow or freezing rain starts, and plowing once snow falls.

8. The City of Vancouver has over 100 pieces of snow equipment, including salters, plows, and specialized equipment to clear bike lanes, as well as 200 trained staff and the ability to manufacture brine at its National Yard to deal with winter conditions including snow and ice.
9. Although the City of Vancouver has snow and ice removal equipment designed for clearing roads, as well as specialized snow and ice removal equipment for clearing bike routes, the City lacks sufficient or appropriate equipment specifically designed to clear sidewalks and high priority pedestrian areas of the city even though walking is the highest priority mode in the City's transportation hierarchy and central to the City's Climate Emergency Response.
10. The City's current priority locations for snow and ice removal in Vancouver's snow response protocol are:
 - Major roads
 - Bus routes
 - Bridges
 - Emergency access routes (including five major hospitals and two health care facilities)
 - School routes
 - 15 most-used bike routes
 - Bus stops
 - Arterial corner ramps
11. It has been widely observed that although the City clears snow and ice from the city's 15 most-used bike routes on a priority basis, the city's parallel pedestrian walking paths are not cleared with the same or greater degree of priority.
12. It is commonly accepted that the Lower Mainland / Metro Vancouver region can expect to experience snow and ice conditions during any given year (with some years being mercifully and relatively free of snow and ice). Historically for example:
 - Snow and ice conditions from December 2016 to January 2017 represented the third time in eight years the City of Vancouver experienced extreme cold weather and was seemingly caught unprepared for such a weather event;
 - At the January 15, 2013 Regular Council Meeting, in response to the December 2012 snow and ice conditions in Vancouver, a motion introduced by Councillor Affleck entitled "Snow Removal Plan" carried unanimously; and
 - At the December 3, 2009 Standing Committee on City Services and Budgets, in response to a motion introduced by Councillor Woodsworth, Council received a staff report relating to the extreme winter conditions experienced from December 13, 2008 to January 8, 2009. The 2009 report notes many of the same concerns the city continues to experience during snow and ice events today, including concern for persons who are vulnerable to becoming homebound and negatively impacted in terms of routine access to food, medicine and other necessities.

13. Snow and ice conditions across Metro Vancouver can vary widely, as do the urban/suburban characteristics of each constituent municipality, leading to corresponding differences in each municipality's snow and ice response plans, actions and priorities. For example, communities on the North Shore of Burrard Inlet such as North and West Vancouver and Coquitlam are more mountainous than Vancouver, while the City of Richmond (which averages just one metre above sea level) only found it necessary to include single-family residences in its by-law covering sidewalk snow and ice removal quite recently in 2017 (Bylaw 5870).
14. On a national scale, where snow and ice are a bigger part of civic life during winter than in Metro Vancouver, and in terms of clearing snow and ice from sidewalks and high priority pedestrian areas, the City of Toronto, for example, has 600 snow plows, 300 sidewalk plows, 200 salt trucks, and 1,500 personnel ready to tackle winter conditions 24 hours per day and 7 days per week. The City of Toronto spends about \$90 million annually to deliver its winter operations program, which includes a Sidewalk Plowing Program that clears about 6,400 km of Toronto's 7,900 km of sidewalk including high pedestrian volume sidewalks on arterial roads, transit routes, near school zones, and around accessibility locations (Note: the service does not include the clearing of snow from driveways or private sidewalks leading to a residence).
15. The Engineering Department addresses snow events in two stages; Snow Readiness and Snow Response. The 2019/2020 budget for snow readiness is \$1.6 million and supports advance preparation for the winter season to ensure our city is well equipped to deal with extreme snow events. Snow response occurs only during a snow event and the amount spent depends on the magnitude of the event and response required. The City of Vancouver's budget includes an annual Council Contingency for such events of \$2 million; snow response is charged against this contingency. In the 2019 budget, Council reduced the contingency from \$4 million to \$2 million. Recognizing the more frequent occurrence of snow and storm events, for the 2020 budget staff recommended \$2 million for the snow response contingency reserve. However Council reduced the amount to \$1 million.
16. The maintenance and cleanliness of roads and sidewalks, including extreme weather response and dealing with snow and ice, are among the core, most basic jurisdictional responsibilities of local governments such as the City of Vancouver. It is therefore incumbent upon the City and Council to remain open at all times to new and better ways to adapt to conditions and to meet the evolving needs and expectations of the city's residents, visitors, and businesses.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to identify High Priority Pedestrian Areas and Sidewalks in the city and report back by May, 2020 with information and recommendations for incorporating these areas and sidewalks into the City's Snow Protocol and Response Strategy, in accordance with the topmost priority accorded to walking in the City's hierarchy of transportation modes, the City's Complete Streets Strategy, Equity goals, and Climate Emergency Response actions and objectives.

- B. THAT Council direct staff to include information in the report back outlining the City's responsibilities and obligations with respect to identified High Priority Pedestrian Areas and Sidewalks, along with the respective responsibilities and obligations of adjacent private property owners and/or their representative agencies (such as BIAs and other jurisdictions such as TransLink).
- C. THAT Council direct staff to consult with the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation with respect to equipment and strategies employed by the Park Board for clearing snow and ice from walkways and pathways under their jurisdiction and to include this information in the report back to Council, including information relating to operational efficiencies that could potentially be achieved by partnering with the Park Board to clear snow and ice from appropriate High Priority Pedestrian Areas and Sidewalks.
- D. THAT Council direct staff to investigate, and include in the report back information relating to opportunities to enhance the City's snow and ice removal equipment fleet through the acquisition of snow removal equipment specifically designed or retrofitted for clearing sidewalks and high priority pedestrian areas of the city in an efficient and cost-effective manner, including equipment that could serve the dual function of clearing pedestrian pathways and bike lanes. Further that consideration be given to acquiring this equipment under the City's current 2020 budget or upcoming 2021 budget in order for the equipment to be available in time for any snow events during the 2020/2021 winter season.

* * * * *