

## Sidewalks, Downtown's core active transportation network

Monday October 17, 2022

I'd like to bring forward the concept of a walkable downtown in a northern winter city. Clearing sidewalks isn't only an issue for seniors or people with disabilities. I believe hospital/doctor/physio statistics would show downtown falls are an issue for a wide variety of folk.

I had originally thought the City's survey on the [Snow and Ice Program Review](#) was to look at ideas from other winter cities.

But when I filled out the survey, I quickly noted that it was mostly about roads, with some questions around active transportation and paved paths. There was little about sidewalks, or about the effectiveness of the complaint-driven bylaw process. I submitted this observation as part of my survey response. Regretfully, I didn't keep a copy of the survey, nor my response, and there's no access to the actual survey on the City website. Nor was this mentioned as part of the meeting minutes for tonight.

Changing weather patterns have made for very slippery conditions for walking the past few years, both spring and fall. In the past couple of years, the City has been responsive at clearing, gritting paved trails. However, the main active transportation route downtown is a sidewalk.

As it stands, current sidewalk clearing is inherently unfair to property owners. A property owner with a sidewalk must clear it, but one without a sidewalk has no obligation; a corner lot has twice the area to maintain. Main Street businesses tend to do a better job, perhaps because they recognize that they need people walking into their businesses. Some businesses don't rely on walk-in traffic and completely ignore clearing. Even fines are unfair— large businesses and organizations (such as YG) sometimes cover a whole blocks, yet would receive the same \$100 fine as a single family home owner for not clearing the sidewalk.

### Suggestions or thoughts

- We need a second survey that just addresses sidewalks and the current complaint-driven process, and that believes that a walkable downtown is a realistic and equitable goal.
  - Without questions advancing concerns about and solutions to winter accessibility issues in downtown, the first survey wasn't actually looking at increasing equitable access to sidewalk users.
  - From survey introduction: "Our promise to you: We will keep you informed, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the program." Is there a what-we-heard document as promised?
  - We need statistics on number of complaints, speed of handling and fines assessed.
- Map 3/9 Riverdale
  - Designate north end path under Robert Campbell bridge as red dashed, Paved Trail, snow cleared #2.
  - Downtown's primary walking access to the Hospital–Long Lake trails is usually completely unusable. Designate switchback at Lewes and Hospital Road as brown dashed, Non-paved Trail, snow cleared
- Map 2/9 Downtown at Shipyards Park
  - Help! How can we safely cross the ice skating oval to access the accessible playground inside the oval.
  - Designate a couple of corridors that get full sidewalk clearing for walking. I suggest 3rd and 5th.
- Helping a senior clear their windrow is nice but perhaps they also need help clearing their sidewalk. Or just as likely, that person may really want to walk downtown to go to the bank or buy groceries.
- Painted white crosswalks are often the slipperiest places downtown.
- Windrows become icy and very slippery to cross. Access to sidewalks from parking spots, even from accessible parking spots, can be blocked.

#### *Objectives of the City's Snow and Ice Control Policy:*

- (1) Allow safe and equitable access to winter Transportation Routes including roadways, Sidewalks and active Transportation Routes;*
- (3) Prevent or reduce collisions, slips, falls and injury to people due to winter conditions;*
- (4) Balance the limited resources of the City and the competing interests of City residents and other stakeholders*

*From proposed replacement Snow and Ice Control Bylaw*

## **Vision**

Whitehorse should have good accessibility for everyone in the Downtown Core throughout the year, including winter. We have almost got an updated OCP. Will it say anything about a walkable winter wilderness downtown?

- walking is the only free recreation option open to many people
- climate change has delivered more shoulder and mid winter melts creating very icy conditions
- Downtown must be safely walkable in all seasons, between homes and businesses
- for Whitehorse to have less urban sprawl, Downtown needs to be denser
- it needs to be more desirable to live and to work Downtown, to attract both businesses and residents
- Whitehorse needs a Downtown with a vibrancy outside of 9-5 business hours
- Downtown needs better access to recreation, nature, wilderness, quiet
- Downtown needs to have a dark skies plan
- it needs a walking/trail plan for Downtown, including Hospital–Long Lake trails
- There needs to be a pedestrian bridge to the Hospital

## **Clearing sidewalks in the winter**

- being complaint-based makes one feel like a pariah calling out neighbours,
- one way: hire someone to walk the streets, call bylaw on each transgressing property
- another possibility is a specific officer whose focus is to issue tickets as seen to be necessary
- another solution lies in developing a different strategy for each class of landowners:
  - city (parks, playgrounds, buildings, cemeteries); YG (Yukon Housing, Grey Mountain, various other departments); commercial; MURBs/condos; single homes; vacant properties
  - fines could be per metre of sidewalk or by class of property owner.
- what about walking on streets without sidewalks, behind or beside parked cars such as on Third Avenue?
- what about vehicles parking on snow-covered sidewalks?
- letdowns and sidewalks at alleys are often treacherous
- if no sidewalks, parking sometimes even block entrance paths to a building
- snow-free park benches are a lifeline for frail people needing breaks
- most straightforward solution: city clears with heavy equipment; we pay taxes for services like this.

## **Some observations about snow clearing practices:**

- most businesses/adjacent property owners clear their sidewalks promptly and provide for good accessibility, some are excellent
- a small proportion do minimal work that provides for partial accessibility (a narrow path or uneven terrain)
- a smaller proportion do not have any regular or insufficient maintenance practices
- vacant properties are particularly problematic
- many curb cuts and alleys are not adequately cleared
- a sidewalk is only as accessible as the least accessible section
- clearing of snow and ice from sidewalks could be low priority for bylaw enforcement
- enforcement actions do not always result in continued compliance
- enforcement action can take weeks

Peter

