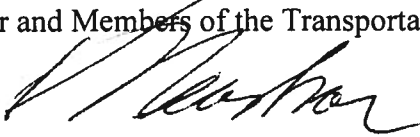


**Transportation Standing Committee
September 27, 2012**

TO: Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: 
Ken Reashor, P.Eng., Traffic Authority

DATE: August 23, 2012

SUBJECT: Winter Parking Ban

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This is an update to the May 26, 2011 Information Report to the Transportation Standing Committee and subsequent Recommendation Report of June 14, 2011 to Regional Council by the Transportation Standing Committee.

BACKGROUND

On May 26, 2011 an Information Report titled, "Winter Parking Ban" was submitted to the Transportation Standing Committee in response to motions passed at the January 27, 2011 meeting of the Transportation Standing Committee and the March 1, 2011 meeting of Regional Council. These motions each expressed varying concerns associated with the implementation and operation of the winter parking ban up to that point in time. The Transportation Standing Committee recommended that:

1. Regional Council support the option provided by the Traffic Authority to consider a trial period during which the overnight winter parking regulations would only be enforced during declared snow and ice operations;
2. Regional Council accept that existing snow and ice operational service standards may be impacted without the continuous overnight winter parking regulations in place;
3. Regional Council approve the expenditure of up to \$80,000 from the Winter Works budget for overtime costs associated with the increased enforcement of the overnight winter parking regulations by Halifax Regional Police and if required fund this expense through the Snow and Ice Reserve Q309.

As a result, changes to the winter parking ban were implemented for the 2011/2012 winter season.

Rather than align the start date and implementation of a blanket winter parking ban with the Province, this would begin a two year trial of a flexible and intermittent winter parking ban based on prevailing weather conditions. The Traffic Authority, in conjunction with Municipal Operations and Corporate Communications notified the public the day before the overnight winter parking ban was to be implemented and it would last until officially lifted by the Traffic Authority, which could be 48 hours or more (meaning at least two nights), that is until the streets were cleared by Municipal Operations. In addition, it was agreed that the winter parking ban would be lifted at 6 a.m. rather than 7 a.m. as in previous years and that the Province would amend their winter parking ban to mirror this time change.

The information contained within this report has been compiled to provide an update regarding the first year of the trial winter parking ban and to provide details regarding various operational capabilities and concerns in dealing with the trial winter parking ban as well as some proposed changes to improve the winter parking ban in year two of the trial.

DISCUSSION

Traffic Complaints

Traffic and Right of Way Services staff received practically no complaints about the trial winter parking ban. In previous years, complaints about the winter parking ban were common. Due to the relatively mild winter and low amount of snowfall, it is impossible to determine if this drop in complaints is due to the new method of implementation or the weather, so a second year of the trial winter parking ban will be beneficial to further assess the effectiveness of it.

Winter Works Event Days

An event is any change in weather which requires a response from Municipal Operations (i.e. salting, plowing, snow removal). The events are classified as Major Event (15+ cm), Average Event (5-15 cm), Minor Event (0-5 cm), Freezing Rain, Salting Event (these occur for wet roads in danger of freezing, black ice, blowing snow or frost).

There were 57 winter works event days between November 23, 2011 and April 8, 2012. The crews were on the roads for the following events:

- Major Event – 2 days
- Average Event – 17 days
- Minor Event – 9 days
- Freezing Rain – 4 days
- Salting Events – 25 days

Though an actual snow or ice event may occur within the limits of one day, the actual cleanup of the event will generally last two to three days, hence the number of event days listed above. The Traffic Authority models the HRM winter parking ban dates after the Provincial Traffic Authority's dates to maintain consistency. The effective dates for the winter parking ban are December 15th to March 31st. Six event days occurred before this date, while two days occurred after the cutoff date, which are included in the 57 event days.

The winter parking ban was declared nine times during the 2011/2012 winter season, twice lasting two nights, otherwise only lasting one night. One was for a major event, one a freezing rain event and the others for an average event, sometimes combined with a salting event. In one instance the winter parking ban was declared, but then cancelled as the weather forecast changed later in the day. The winter parking ban was declared each time by the Traffic Authority with input from Municipal Operations and based on forecasted weather conditions.

Plowing Difficulties Due to Parked Vehicles

Specific records are not kept regarding problem streets as they are simply dealt with as they are encountered, but in general Peninsular Halifax tends to pose the greatest challenge with regards to parked vehicles, along with specific pockets of Dartmouth.

Ticketing & Towing

There were 6324 tickets issued under the declared winter parking ban by the Halifax Regional Police (HRP) in 2011/12.

In comparison, in previous years:

- 2010/11 – 7810 tickets issued
- 2009/10 – 11125 tickets issued
- 2008/09 – 19367 tickets issued

In addition, the RCMP issued 134 winter parking ban tickets.

150 vehicles were towed during the parking ban in 2011/12.

In comparison in previous years:

- 2010/11 – 23 vehicles towed
- 2009/10 – 38 vehicles towed
- 2008/09 – 174 vehicles towed

The RCMP did not tow any vehicles in the Halifax District in the 2011/2012 season.

It was generally directed that vehicles would be towed only when snow was falling or subsequent to it to allow for cleanup. When the winter parking ban was declared due to forecasted snow, it was generally left to the Watch Commander to decide if ticketing or towing was required based on the weather at the start of the winter parking ban (1 a.m.). So if the weather actually turned to rain for example, vehicles were ticketed rather than towed.

Additionally, during two day events, if vehicles were parked and it was obvious that the snow had been cleared, they were ticketed as opposed to towed, except in those instances where vehicles were obviously left on street and had been plowed around – these vehicles were towed.

In order to better serve the citizens of HRM, it is proposed that in the event of a declared winter parking ban, the Winter Operations Superintendent will contact the Watch Commander confirming the snow event and detail the number of officers to be called out and their duties. During the snow event, Operations staff will contact the Dispatch Centre via the main contact number to advise of streets which require ticketing and/or towing. Citizen complaints will be accepted at the Dispatch Centre, with the appropriate zone car or parking enforcement officer to arrange for ticketing or towing, as necessary.

Improvements need to be made in towing response times. 59 of the 150 towing cases (40%) had arrival times longer than one hour as officers must remain until the tow trucks arrive to complete the seized vehicle slip and document any damage, add the vehicle to CPIC, as seized, which allows HRP to track the vehicle and ensure when the owner calls to state his car was stolen, HRP knows it was towed and not stolen, and stand by until the vehicle is actually attached to the tow truck and ready to be towed. HRP remains with the tow truck to ensure the safety of the tow truck driver as many owners become quite irate when they realize their vehicle is being towed.

All of these factors slow down the ability of police to facilitate the seizure of vehicles. This lengthy process limits resources by reducing the number of vehicles that can be towed, decreasing the number of winter parking ban tickets that can be issued, and increasing the length of time it takes to properly clean a street. It needs to be determined before the season starts if the towing company is able to improve on this service with its current resources.

Communications

The communications objective for winter safety operations and in particular the winter parking ban was to create awareness and educate HRM residents on the specifics around the new pilot approach to the overnight winter parking ban. The primary goal of communications was to

strongly emphasize the need for residents to take responsibility for planning ahead and keeping informed of when a winter parking ban was in effect.

Communications Tools and Tactics

Information initially went out in September 2011 letting residents know of changes to the winter parking ban model, the importance of staying informed and planning ahead and the ways they could receive or access information. They included:

- Public Service Announcements - issued every time the winter parking ban went into effect and every time it was lifted.
- Halifax.ca - information was posted to the “snow” page and was linked from front page and included the Twitter feed.
- Twitter “@hfxgov” - information was communicated through Twitter in advance of every snow event to advise people to stay informed as a winter parking ban was likely; information was also communicated through Twitter every time the parking ban was put into effect and lifted – additional reminders were also tweeted.
- Corporate Call Centre – residents were also made aware they could contact 490-4000 to find out if the parking ban was in effect.

In addition, the marketing team launched an extensive ad campaign which included print, radio and online information.

Challenges

Communications was definitely more challenging with the new winter parking ban model, both for the city and residents, in terms of communicating when a winter parking ban was in effect and for the residents in knowing when to look out for it. Given this feedback from residents as the season progressed, more emphasis was put on explaining all the factors that play into the decision to put a winter parking ban in effect (forecast, operations, climates), in an effort to provide some additional context. Another observation was the fact that many weather events took place over the weekend. It is likely that some residents weren't as tuned in to traditional and social media over the weekend the way they would normally be during the week. One other concern that was brought to our attention was that there was some confusion around when the winter parking ban was in effect for more than one night. During the 2011/12 season the wording in the PSA that went out declaring that the winter parking ban was in effect, included that the winter parking ban was in effect “until further notice” and/or “the weather and snow clearing operations will dictate how long the overnight ban will remain in effect”, and/or “that HRM would notify residents when it had been lifted”.

Due to this potential confusion, the communications team is recommending that HRM provide a type of ‘alert system’ via e-mail, text or phone in which residents can subscribe to a service to be notified when the winter parking ban is declared and lifted.

Call Centre

The Call Centre does not currently have a specific winter parking ban code and all complaints are inserted into a general parking complaint code. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to extract specific winter parking ban related complaints from the system.

A new code will be created for the 2012/2013 winter season and all winter parking ban related calls will be assigned that code. This will be extremely helpful in not only determining how many calls are received about the winter parking ban, but the nature of the calls, which will aid us in determining if and where we need to make adjustments to the process on an ongoing basis.

Additional Costs Associated with the Trial Winter Parking Ban

The total cost for HRP officers called out during the winter parking ban was \$22,354.00 in 2011/12. During previous years, the patrol officers issued tickets and seized as needed during their regular patrols, so callouts were not required. This cost was absorbed in the Winter Works budget, funded through the Snow and Ice Reserve Q309.

Municipal Operations spent \$23,600 on advertising for the 2011/12 winter season, with about 95% of that dedicated to the trial winter parking ban. Approximately \$31,000 was spent in each of the two previous winter seasons, with the majority of that spent on 30 second TV commercials about winter & snowplough safety. Last season's advertising expenses were reduced due to the expanding use of social media and online advertising. It was determined that this was a much more cost effective and efficient way of communicating with a broader audience.

Conclusion

It is widely agreed among all involved in the winter parking ban process that the 2011/2012 season was not a season which we can accurately compare with other years, due to the lack of snow. There were a number of events requiring the winter parking ban for salting and de-icing even though there was no snow. Because of these types of events, not uncommon to this region, it is clear that communication behind the reasoning of implementing the winter parking ban for these events must be improved, as the general public may not fully understand that winter operations are ongoing throughout the winter even when snow isn't present.

Proposed changes to the 2012/13 service delivery for the second year of the trial winter parking ban:

- Residents must be better informed as to when and why the winter parking ban may be implemented (weather forecasts, operational requirements, etc.) before the winter season begins, and informed that parking overnight on the street is not allowed until the winter parking ban has been officially rescinded, even if a street has been plowed, as it is a blanket winter parking ban, not one which can be removed on a street by street basis. Ticketing, but not towing, may occur on streets which have already been plowed;
- An e-mail/text/phone alert system to be created to inform residents that the winter parking ban is in place or is lifted;

- A specific Hansen code will be created to allow tracking of calls to the call centre regarding the winter parking ban;
- Communication with the towing companies to improve response times, and;
- The Winter Operations Superintendent will contact the Watch Commander confirming the snow event and detail the number of officers to be called out and their duties.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT


Community engagement was not deemed to be necessary in this process because decisions were based on operational procedures.

ATTACHMENT

2011-12 Winter Works Event Calendar

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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2011-12 Winter Works Event Calendar

Major Event - + 15 cm's

Minor Event - 0 - 5 cm's

Average Event - 5 - 15 cm's

Freezing Rain

Salting Event - Wet roads, black ice, blowing snow, frost.

November 2011						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23 Event 1 - Major	24 Salting Event	25 Salting Event	26
27	28	29	30			

December 2011						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4 Salting Event	5	6	7	8	9	10 Salting Event
11 Salting Event	12	13	14	15	16	17 Salting Event
18 Salting Event	19	20	21	22	23 Event 2 - Major	24
25	26 Salting Event	27 Salting Event	28	29 Salting Event	30	31

January 2012						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Salting Event	2	3	4 Event 3 - Minor	5 Event 3 - Minor Salting Event	6 Salting Event	7
8	9	10	11	12 Event 4 - Average	13 Event 4 - Average Salting Event	14 Salting Event
15	16	17 Salting Event	18	19	20 Event 5 - Average	21 Salting Event
22 Salting Event	23	24	25	26	27 Event 6 - Average	28
29	30 Event 7 - Minor	31 Event 8 - Minor Salting Event				

February 2012						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 Event 8 - Minor	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11 Event 9 - Freezing
12 Event 9 - Freezing	13 Salting Event	14 Salting Event	15	16	17	18 Event 10 - Average
19 Salting Event	20	21	22 Event 11 - Minor	23	24 Event 12 - Minor	25 Event 12 - Minor
26 Salting Event	27	28 Event 13- Average	29			

March 2012						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Event 14- Average	2 Event 14- Average	3 Event 15 - Minor
					Salting Event	
4 Event 16- Average	5 Event 16- Average	6	7	8	9	10
	Salting Event					
11	12	13 Event 17 - Freezing	14 Event 17 - Freezing	15 Event 18- Average	16 Event 18- Average	17 Event 19- Average
			Event 18- Average		Event 19- Average	
18	19	20	21	21	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

April 2012						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Event 20- Average
8 Event 20- Average	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					