



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ACCESSIBILITY IN HRM
MINUTES
September 10, 2015**

PRESENT: Mayor Mike Savage (ex-officio)
Patricia Gates, Chair
Krista Daley, Vice Chair
Councillor Wayne Mason
Yvon Clement
Gerry Post
Meredith Fillmore
Mikiko Terashima

REGRETS: Councillor Steve Craig
Nancy Beaton
Troy Nauffts

STAFF: Laughlin Rutt, Diversity Consultant, Government Relations and External Affairs
Bruce Zvaniga, Director, Transportation and Public Works
Darrin Natolino, Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation and Public Works
Scott Sheffield, Community Developer, Government Relations and External Affairs
Jennifer Weagle, Legislative Assistant, Office of the Municipal Clerk
Jenny Benson, Legislative Support, Office of the Municipal Clerk

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

The agenda, supporting documents, and information items circulated to the Committee are available online: <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/access/150910-agenda.php>

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m., and the Committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. in Halifax Hall, City Hall, 1841 Argyle Street, Halifax. Roll call was taken.

The Chair explained that this special meeting was called at the request of staff, for the Committee to offer advice to staff and to Regional Council, by way of the Transportation Standing Committee, with regard to options to improve winter sidewalk clearing outcomes, as per direction from Council on August 4, 2015.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 15, 2015

The Chair noted that she was also in attendance at the public consultation meeting regarding the Service Dog Park discussed at the June 15, 2015 meeting, and asked that this be noted in the minutes.

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Krista Daley,

THAT the minutes of June 15, 2015, be approved as amended.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

MOVED by Krista Daley, seconded by Meredith Fillmore,

THAT the agenda be approved as circulated.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES – None

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Options to Improve Winter Sidewalk Clearing Outcomes – Mr. Bruce Zvaniga, Director, Transportation & Public Works

Mr. Zvaniga thanked the Committee for the opportunity to have this discussion. He explained that Council has asked him to return to Council with recommendations on 3 separate issues. Sidewalk clearing and pedestrian issues will be discussed at Council in September, the geographic expansion of city plowing (and its interaction with provincial plowing) will be discussed in November and a broader report on how to achieve and provide better service will be delivered in January, 2016.

Mr. Zvaniga noted the importance of the Committee prioritizing outcomes for the upcoming winter season.

The Committee asked if Mr. Zvaniga had a priority list already. He shared that to date priority issues have been the clearing of snow around the push buttons for crosswalks, barriers at ramped intersections and bus stops and bus stop clearance.

Councillor Mason shared with the Committee that he has already shared a number of his concerns to Council. The core issue is articulating the standards so that they reflect what is needed and are enforceable when they are revised in 2016/2017. There are a number of companies responsible for various aspects of snow clearing which poses challenges. For example, you cannot expect the company responsible for cleaning the inside of the bus shelter to accomplish their task when the outside of the bus

shelter has not been cleared. Councillor Mason shared that in other cities contractors are bound to timelines by legal contracts. The standards in Halifax need to be defensible and more iron-clad.

Mayor Savage joined the meeting.

Mr. Gerry Post shared seven recommendations:

1. The clearing of sidewalks and bus stops should have the same standard as the street that they are adjacent to. For example, if a Priority 1 Road is to be cleared in 12 hours, the bus stops and sidewalks on that road should also be cleared in 12 hours.
2. Snow clearance needs to be to the curb so that buses can provide their usual standard of service.
3. Snow needs to be cleared around the buttons at pedestrian crossings.
4. Curb cuts in Halifax need to be properly designed with snow clearance in mind.
5. Residents should have access to information about the locations of storm drains. Mr. Post suggested that a formal program be developed where individuals could adopt a drain. He also suggested that an app be produced with the drain locations. The appropriate clearance of drains is very important to individuals in wheelchairs.
6. That an E-311 app be developed so that residents can take a picture of a problem, voice their concern and mark the location through Google Maps to ensure accurate reporting

Mr. Post advised that he met with Business Associations to discuss an idea that business associations require businesses to take responsibility for their own sidewalk snow clearance. He indicated that this idea was not accepted by the associations.

The Chair stated that she was speaking on behalf of individuals who are blind and partially sighted. She expressed that it can be intimidating and difficult to navigate sidewalks where there is a bobcat operating. She suggested that safety training for snow removal staff could be very beneficial. Having curb cuts and the areas around push buttons are also very important.

Mayor Savage thanked Mr. Zvaniga and his team for the work they have done to date. He stated that there are two things that are really needed. The first is better results. He would also like to see better communication between people who are trying to help and the city. The Mayor would like a Committee to meet regularly throughout the winter and for individuals who want to help to be taken seriously and utilized. The Mayor stated that everyone understands that we had a difficult winter last year but what can we do to make it better in the future.

Ms. Meredith Filmore shared concerns about the height of snow banks. The snow banks around her house were over 12 ft tall and she had to stop driving because she was unable to exit her driveway safely. She believes that we are very lucky as a city that there were no tragedies this winter as a result of the large banks. In Montreal, the snow banks are not an issue even though it snows every day. While Ms. Filmore understands that sidewalks are the top priority, reducing the height of snow banks are also an important factor in increasing visibility and improving conditions for driver and pedestrian safety.

Mr. Yvon Clement stated that his priorities are sidewalks and bus stops. He really struggled last winter to navigate sidewalks and find bus stops. This is a challenge for many individuals including those with strollers, wheelchairs and disabilities.

Mr. Laughie Rutt, Diversity Consultant, Government Relations and External Affairs, commented from the viewpoint of Municipal staff and a wheelchair user. He explained that when an individual with a disability moves from place to place they view every step of their trip before they set out. They move in a complete trip fashion and they often do not have alternatives. Any differences or changes to their planned route make moving from place to place very difficult and potentially impossible. All citizens deserve an equitable opportunity to be mobile. All citizens also deserve an equitable amount of snow clearing regardless of where they are in Halifax.

Ms. Mikiko Terashima raised the challenges that citizens faced this winter while navigating hazardous pot holes. She noted the importance of having a long term plan that is communicated to the community. Short term thinking brings up a variety of issues such as measuring the level of success in mild winters; communicating a long-term plan would be helpful.

Councillor Mason shared that Peninsular Halifax has one of the highest percentages of individuals walking to work compared to other medium sized cities. The area with the most individuals walking to work corresponded with the areas where residents were clearing sidewalks. More and more individuals are moving further out of the city so we need to think about the clearing outside of downtown also. Right now it is fundamentally more difficult for individuals to be pedestrians outside of the downtown core.

Mayor Savage shared that he is not looking to reduce the quality of snow removal to save costs. Halifax needs the most effective snow and ice removal in the most cost effective fashion.

Mayor Savage and Ms. Krista Daley left the meeting at approx. 5:00 p.m.

The Chair stated that not everyone uses computers or mobile devices so communication by other medium such as radio is also very important. She also mentioned that 3-1-1 could be more helpful to individuals with disabilities. It was suggested that perhaps staff from 3-1-1 come and speak with the Committee and Mr. Zvaniga stated that he would take the Committee's concerns back to 3-1-1.

The Chair shared that guide dogs are trained to go around obstacles and many guide dogs considered the sidewalks to be obstacles last winter. This meant that guide dogs led their owners into the middle of the road. Mr. Clement shared that the large amount of salt that the city puts down also hurts guide dogs' paws.

The Committee agreed that its top priorities are sidewalks, curb cuts, bus stops and push buttons.

The Chair brought up the issue of sidewalks getting cleared and then filled back in by the street snow plows. Mr. Natalino agreed that there are issues around coordinating the street crews and sidewalk crews.

Mr. Natalino advised that more equipment is going to be ready for Halifax on retainer this winter. During the past winter equipment and operators were scarce.

Mr. Post shared the thought that everyone is a pedestrian, but not everyone is a driver. If it is good for the disabled it is good for everyone.

MOVED by Gerry Post, seconded by Mikiko Terashima,

THAT the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommend to the Transportation Standing Committee the following four areas for priority snow clearing for the 2015/16 winter season, in no particular order:

- 1. Sidewalks**
- 2. Curb cuts**
- 3. Bus stops, including access to the street**
- 4. Signaled crosswalk activation buttons**

And that consideration be given to aligning snow clearing standards for sidewalks and bus stops to be the same standard as the street they serve.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

6. **ADDED ITEMS** - None
7. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** – Monday, **September 21, 2015**, 4:00-6:00 p.m., Halifax Hall, Main Floor, 1841 Argyle Street, Halifax
8. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Jenny Benson
Legislative Support