



PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

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Committee of the Whole
August 9, 2005

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Labrecque".

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Michael Labrecque, Director, Transportation & Public Works

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dale MacLennan".

Dale MacLennan, Director, Financial Services

DATE: August 2, 2005

SUBJECT: Sidewalk Snowplowing - Service Delivery Options

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

At the June 28, 2005 meeting of Regional Council, staff committed to bringing forward a report in August 2005 presenting various service delivery options for consideration by Council effective with the 2006-07 fiscal year.

BACKGROUND

Prior to municipal amalgamation, sidewalk snowplowing existed in the former City of Dartmouth, Town of Bedford, and sections of the former Halifax County. The former City of Halifax did not provide this service to its residents, nor were residents charged for this service. Instead, property owners in Halifax were responsible for the removal of snow from the sidewalks abutting their properties. Over a period of several years following amalgamation, the service was extended to some sections of the former City of Halifax. In 2002-03, former District 15 began receiving the service. In 2003-04, the service was extended to the former District 16, excluding Bayers Lake Business Park. For 2005-06, the service will be further extended to include areas which became part

of Districts 15 or 17 as the result of changes to District boundaries. Also effective in 2005-06, the service will include sidewalks adjacent to intersections throughout all of the former City of Halifax.

With the exception of sidewalks abutting HRM owned properties, the service has been funded by means of area rates. Starting in 2005-06, the plowing of sidewalks adjacent to intersections throughout the serviced area will be funded from the general urban tax rate.

Council has expressed concern over both the lack of uniformity in the delivery of this service, and in the means by which it is funded, and has therefore directed staff to explore various scenarios for service delivery and funding.

DISCUSSION

Proposed Discussion Format

Staff recognizes that there are many views on this matter and that complaints around sidewalk snowplowing is a perennial issue. Staff do feel that whatever approach is finally approved by Council, and incorporated into an operating practice, should remain for a period of at least five years.

Staff proposes to present the options available to Council, and then provide additional information at subsequent meetings based on direction provided by Council. Staff feel that it will likely take three meetings to secure direction on this matter, consider all the operational considerations, and finally approve a funding approach for the approved solution.

The proposed format for Council is as follows:

1. Discussion of service levels and service standards - (August 9, 2005)
2. Discussion of service delivery approach for the proposed service level and standard. This would include things such as rationalizing the contracted portion of service - (September 13, 2005)
3. Discussion of a funding approach (including general rate vs area rate) (October 11, 2005)

As Council makes decisions at each meeting, staff will return at the next meeting with the information required to progress to the next stage of discussion and decision making. In this way, it is hoped that a comprehensive service delivery plan will be developed which includes service levels, service standards, mechanisms for delivering the service, and the means by which the service will be funded. While all of these elements are included in the options which follow in this report, discussion for this meeting should focus on service levels and standards. Based on direction provided by Council on service levels and standards, staff will return with further information on service delivery mechanisms and funding at the next meeting.

Service Delivery Options

What follows are the service delivery options for discussion. Staff have included the indicative costs to deliver each approach. Staff feel these are adequate for the purpose of debate and when combined with costing information provided to date, it should provide sufficient information to lead to a decision on an approach.

Additionally, there are two issues that must be considered in conjunction with all options. First, the Collective Agreement between HRM and Halifax Civic Workers' Union/CUPE Local 108 was scheduled for renewal in November, 2004 and negotiations continue. The results of the upcoming negotiations may have an impact on how HRM is able to provide service. Second, there is a lack of consistency between the time frame required for abutters to clear their sidewalks (as outlined in Bylaw S-300) and the Council approved service standard for servicing of HRM plowed sidewalks.

What follows are the options for consideration:

- 1. Provide sidewalk snow removal for all sidewalks in the entire municipality, including residential sidewalks.**

Service Level and Standard: This option provides a consistent level of service throughout HRM through the addition of approximately 400 km of sidewalk to the snow removal program. Staff believe that it will be a challenge to find enough equipment (both HRM-owned and contracted) to provide the service to the current service level of 72 hours. It is also likely that the 72-hour service standard would be unacceptable in the downtown core, necessitating the need for the consideration of tiered service standards. The adoption of this option would also eliminate the need for Bylaw S-300.

Funding: The additional service will increase costs by approximately \$3.2 million for a total program cost of approximately \$5.7 million. This does not include potential capital cost considerations.

Should Council wish to retain the area rate, the cost per \$100 of assessed value will increase from 1.4 cents (exclusive of deficit) to 2.8 cents per \$100 of assessed value. Alternatively, Council may wish to consider eliminating the area rate and adding this service to the General Urban Rate. Strategies will need to be developed to ensure there is operational and financial capacity in the 2006/07 fiscal year to manage an approximate increase of \$4.9 million in services provided from the General Urban Rate (increased service of \$3.2 million plus current area rated service of \$1.7 million). Any areas receiving service outside the Urban area would still be subject to the appropriate area rate. Currently, the only areas outside the urban area receiving this service is Fall River and Waverley. An appropriate strategy would need to be developed to ensure appropriate cost allocation to this service area.

2. Maintain arterial and major collector sidewalks in all of HRM, but not residential sidewalks.

Service Level and Standard: This option provides a consistent level of service across HRM and provides sidewalk snow clearing service to approximately 410 km of sidewalks. Main arterials and collectors (such as Robie Street, Bedford Highway, and Portland Street) carry heavy vehicular and pedestrian traffic and serve as emergency routes for hospitals, police and fire stations and major bus routes. In providing this level of service, a small number of walkways would need to be maintained as well. Residents throughout all of HRM not living along main arterials or collectors would be required to clear sidewalks abutting their properties. Bylaw S-300 would need to be amended to reflect this change.

Funding: The estimated cost of this service is \$1,558,000. Staff suggest that the reduction of service would eliminate the need for an area rate and would recommend that the service be funded from the General Urban Rate. Strategies will need to be developed to ensure there is operational and financial capacity in the 2006/07 fiscal year. Any areas receiving service outside the Urban area would still be subject to the appropriate area rate.

Under this option, HRM would need to consider some increased communication with residents to minimize any confusion for residents as to whether or not they live on a residential street or main arterial. There would be some costs associated with this, however, more detail would be required to present a cost estimate.

3. Maintain the current service levels for sidewalk snow removal but add in collectors/main arterials on the Halifax Peninsula and Districts 17 and 18.

Service Level and Standard: This option adds all 110 kms of sidewalks along main arterials in the former City of Halifax (eg. Barrington, Brunswick, Gottingen, Lower and Upper Water, Spring Garden, Quinpool, Bay Road and Dutch Village Road) to the HRM Sidewalk Clearing Program. All residential streets in peninsular Halifax would continue to be the responsibility of the abutter. It will be a significant challenge to find enough equipment (both HRM-owned and contracted) to provide the service to the current service level of 72 hours. Additionally, there may be an expectation of a wider level of clearance than the current standard of five feet in the downtown core. It is also likely that the 72-hour service standard would be unacceptable in the downtown core, necessitating the need for the consideration of tiered service standards.

Funding: This option adds \$600,000 - \$800,000 of annual costs to the program. Under this option, the plowing of collectors/main arterials becomes a uniform service provided throughout the Urban area. Therefore, it would be appropriate that the cost of snow removal on collectors/main arterials be moved to the Urban General Rate. An appropriate strategy would need to be developed to manage this increased cost. The remainder of the service would continue to be funded by an area rate. As the increase in cost is significant under this option, it is possible that the Urban Rate would need to be increased to accommodate the increase in service.

Although operationally feasible, it is more expensive to clear sidewalks in the Capital District due to the higher density of operational challenges (eg. more corners, manual work and the number of pieces of infrastructure such as street lights, etc). Also, if HRM was to provide a clearance standard wider than five feet, this will have a significant impact on costs, approximately doubling the current estimate.

4. Maintain the current service levels for sidewalk snow removal.

Service Level and Standard: This option maintains the status quo for services delivered and the associated costs. Because much of the former City of Halifax does not receive the service, the existing inconsistent level of service delivery for sidewalk snow removal will likely become more pronounced as more development takes place outside the urban core.

Funding: The 2005-06 Operating Budget for sidewalk snowplowing is \$2,532,000. Of this amount, \$1,736,000 is funded through an area rate with the remaining \$796,000 (\$286,000 for sidewalks abutting HRM owned properties, and \$510,000 for sidewalks abutting intersections) funded through the general urban rate. The area rate for 2005-06 is \$0.014 per \$100 of taxable assessment.

5. Discontinue the service.

Service Level and Standard: Under this option all snow removal on non-HRM owned sidewalks would become the responsibility of the abutter and subject to regulations set out in Bylaw S-300.

Funding: The elimination of the service would allow for the discontinuation of the area rate, allowing for some tax relief for property owners. The elimination of plowing intersection corners would create \$510,000 in capacity within the urban general rate. HRM would still be responsible for plowing sidewalks abutting HRM owned properties. However, the cost of plowing those sidewalks would likely increase with a reduction in the economies of scale as HRM properties are scattered throughout the municipality.

Currently there are no large municipalities in Canada where sidewalk snow plowing is provided by the city for all the sidewalks. The majority, including Saint John and Moncton, plow only selected routes in their business core and school zones.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

As the proposed service changes would not take effect until 2006-07, there are no implications to the Approved 2005-06 Operating and Capital Budget. For future years, implications are briefly outlined in the Discussion section to this report. Further details will be provided in subsequent reports as directed by Council.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

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

ALTERNATIVES

Five alternatives are discussed in this report.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

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

Report Prepared by :

Michael Labrecque, Director, Transportation & Public Works 490-4855

Debbi McCaig, Budget Coordinator, Financial Services 490-4280

Financial Review :

Gordon Roussel, Financial Consultant, Financial Services 490-6468