

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE**Winter Maintenance Policy update****Report Purpose**

To provide the Priorities Committee with an update on winter maintenance and trail public engagement report back information.

Our Prioritized Strategic Goals

Goal 2 - Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure

Continuously improving the way we work, as one organization, in an agile and sustainable manner

Report

Strathcona County follows a priority system based on the Winter Maintenance Policy SER-009-026 to clear winter roads, trails, parking lots and transit stops. The policy guides this work and related operational decision-making.

Overall, the current policy approach is working well to meet winter maintenance needs of the community. However, there are two areas of the policy Transportation and Agriculture Services (TAS) has identified for improvement. These are outlined below.

1. Snow routes and residential roads

The current approach to clearing Priority 3 snow routes and Priority 4 residential roads continued to be a challenge in meeting the needs of residents. The past few years we have seen weather patterns change with multiple freeze-thaw events and multiple freezing rain events midwinter. These weather events have led to existing snow accumulation and snowpack freezing solid and posing a real challenge to remove the bulk of the material out during snow removal events.

The policy outlines the following snow accumulation thresholds for each road type:

- Priority 3 – snow routes (collector roads)
Snow accumulation of 15 – 21 cm
Cleared within eight days after accumulation stops
- Priority 4 – residential streets
Snow accumulation of 10 cm compacted snow (7 cm after Jan. 1)
Cleared within 12 days

Overall, residents are expecting that all existing snowpack and accumulation is removed off the roadway, from curb to curb. Trying to achieve this standard does pose a higher risk to infrastructure with surface damage expected to occur, plus potential for equipment to come into contact with private driveways and landscaping.

The proposed improvements being considered would see:

- Priority 3 – snow routes (collector roads)
Snow accumulation of 15 cm and cleared within six days
- Priority 4 – residential streets
Snow accumulation of 7 cm compacted snow year-round and cleared within 10 days

Priorities Committee Meeting_Jun21_2022

The proposed threshold changes would see snow removal activities start sooner and reduce the risk of accumulation sitting and freezing in place. The improvement would better our operational response, shorten the duration of clearing activities and closer align with resident expectations. There is potential that there will be additional clearing events, but the reduced timelines would see a change in the cost per clearing, resulting in no additional budget impact.

2. Trails and pathways

Strathcona County follows a priority system that defines the order and timelines for clearing 232 km of County-maintained pathways and trails. It takes approximately eight days to clear; however, crews have been able to open trails within five days by using efficiencies found within operations.

In January, Council directed administration to review the feasibility with costs of increasing the trail and pathway clearing to 48 hours for Priority 1 and 2 and 96 hours for Priority 3 and 4. At that time, it was requested that TAS complete public engagement to gather feedback from stakeholders and residents to determine if the current approach is meeting community needs.

The public engagement approach involved two phases. The first phase included stakeholder engagement with six internal and external groups:

- Recreation, Parks and Culture
- Transportation Planning and Engineering
- Transit
- School district stakeholders (Elk Island Public and Catholic Schools)
- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Traffic Safety Advisory Committee

The second phase of public engagement included an online survey to the community. In total, 1,163 responses were received. The complete What We Heard Report can be found in Enclosure 2.

Key takeaways and potential improvements

Based on feedback from stakeholders and residents, some operational improvements can be made that will not impact budget requirements. A summary of the key takeaways and potential improvements are outlined below.

Engagement takeaways:

- Primary trail use is for recreation, not commuting.
- Overall resident satisfaction is fairly high or neutral with timing and quality of trail clearing. No strong indication that community needs are not being met.
- Residents think the current order of priorities makes sense for the community but would like timelines to be shorter.
- Residents are not supportive of a tax increase.
- Private sidewalk clearing was a common concern.
- Connectivity is important – connector pathways and private sidewalks are key.
- General support for destination trails as an option for "ice free" areas.
- Mixed support for use of de-icer because of concern for pets.

Priorities Committee Meeting_Jun21_2022

Potential improvements:

- Reduce the total timelines to complete trail clearing to five days.
- Continue with current priority approach but target higher-traffic locations first.
- Increase school sites to Priority 1 and include trail connections from neighbourhoods to the schools.
- Include remaining neighbourhood connector trails to Priority 3.

Operational improvements:

- Clean all trails in and around school sites within 24 hours.
- Work with school boards to ensure key areas around schools are cleared and prioritized.
- Improve clearing on pararamps and removing windrows around bus stops.
- Increase trail ice-control response in major ice events.
- Increase ice control in County-owned parking lots for accessibility needs.

Communication and education:

- Focus on importance of private sidewalk clearing.
- Communicate the updated trail-clearing standards and revised priority approach with updated policy.

New initiatives:

- Explore adding more destination trails like Broadmoor Lake Park.
- Review potential for trail clearing status tools and technology.

The summarized improvements and operational changes will be updated in the proposed Winter Maintenance Policy which will be brought back in Q3 to Council for consideration.

Council and Committee History

January 18, 2022 That Winter Maintenance Policy SER-009-026 and County service levels for winter trail maintenance be reviewed as outlined in the January 18, 2022 TAS report, and administration provide a report for Council's consideration by the end of the third Quarter of 2022 with a revised policy and corresponding budget amendments.

Other Impacts

Policy: n/a

Legislative/Legal: n/a

Interdepartmental: n/a

Master Plan/Framework: n/a

Communication Plan

The results of the winter trails engagement will be sent to SCOOP members and stakeholders, as well as posted on our website. A communications plan will be developed as part of the Winter Maintenance Policy update in Q3.

Enclosures

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Winter Maintenance Policy update presentation |
| 2 | Winter Trails What We Heard Report |