

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

whitby.ca/CouncilCalendar



Report Title: 2023-24 Winter Maintenance Service Improvements

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: December 11, 2023

Report Number: CMS 10-23

Department(s) Responsible:

Community Services Department

Submitted by:

John Romano, Commissioner,
Community Services

Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief Administrative Officer

For additional information, contact:

Paul Thistle, Director, Operational
Services, 905.430.4333

Hector Moreno, Manager, Operations -
Roads & Traffic 905.430.4335

1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CMS 10-23, 2023-24 Winter Maintenance Service Improvements be received for information.

2. Highlights:

- An additional three ploughing routes have been added through the expansion of contracted services. These additional routes will help ensure minimum maintenance standards are achieved.
- The department will be testing a new liquid de-icer, aimed to improve de-icing during the coldest months.
- A new platform for road weather forecasting will be implemented this winter, which provides enhanced functionality and will help improve winter maintenance operations.

- Changes achieved through collective bargaining allows for the extension of the workday without initiating a full callout procedure, increasing efficiency in service delivery, and maximizing available drivers' hours.
- Will conduct a post significant winter event debrief, including staff from all areas involved in the operation, to review the operation and identify opportunities for improvement.

3. Background

Following each winter season, the Department conducts an annual operational review of all Town winter-related activities including communications, routing, materials, training, the Seniors' Windrow Program, and weather forecasting. Past improvements include re-enforcing web-based communications such as online reporting platform accessible 24/7, uploaded general development site map and updated *Find My Street* tool to include winter maintenance contact information for unassumed roads and services provided by the Town. Have created a single point of contact to monitor and respond to all communications from Mayor and Council during significant storm events. Have increased staff depth and versatility by extending training to staff from other operational services and developed an Equipment Research and Innovation Committee.

4. Discussion

To improve service for the 2023-24 winter maintenance season, staff are planning several changes that are aimed at improving service delivery for residents. The changes are categorized in the following areas: communications, routing, materials, staffing and training, and the Seniors' Windrow Program.

A) Communications

- Communications and Creative Services will be updating the Town website providing timely messaging before, during and after a snow event.
- Operational Services will be monitoring the web-based reporting form, which is available 24/7 for external stakeholders, to report winter related issues. The Map also includes a dashboard for staff to pull, view and run reports on submission activities.
- Communications and Creative Services has updated the Town's website and social media with images and videos to show visitors what they can do to help during a severe winter storm (e.g. move parked cars from roadways, where to place waste receptacles, clear snow off fire hydrants, etc.).

B) Routing

- In an effort to meet recent growth and maintain existing levels of service, road salting and ploughing routes have been increased from 22 to 25 routes averaging 45 lane kilometres each.

- Each of the 25 routes has been further broken down into quadrants. This will aid the salting and ploughing operators to complete the route in a sequential order.
- Moving forward, the quadrants will be completed on a rotational basis to ensure that customers are receiving a more equitable level of service regarding route completion. The route quadrant rotation will be scheduled based on storm type and the feasibility of continuous salting/ploughing activities per event.

C) Materials

- Along with conventional salt brine, regular and treated salt, and sand the department will be piloting the use of ProMelt liquid de-icing during the coldest months of the year (January and February). This product is a versatile de-icing liquid enhanced with magnesium chloride that can be used for anti-icing, on board pre-wetting, pre-treating salt or to enhance the regular salt brine freeze point from -9 C to -26 C. This product will work longer and resist re-freeze for longer periods of time, especially when applied on hills, bridge decks, high collision intersections and rural open areas.

D) Staffing and Training

- Additional staff from other divisions of Operational Services have been cross trained on a variety of types of winter equipment in an ongoing effort to increase staff depth and versatility.
- Increased flexibility was achieved, during the recent contract negotiations which extends the workday without having to initiate the callout process. This will improve utilization of available driver hours and increase our efficiency.
- After each significant weather event, staff will conduct post storm debriefs with operators, forepersons, and management representatives to identify efficiencies and to enhance service levels for the community.
- Staff (in-house and contracted) are scheduled to conduct dry runs through assigned routes to ensure operators familiarize themselves and to help identify potential problem areas such as overhanging wires, tree branches, road/sidewalks deficiencies, obstacles, etc.
- To assist with winter overnight illegal parking issues, the midnight winter maintenance staff will be trained by Bylaw Services to issue overnight parking tickets as needed.

E) Seniors Windrow Program

- In 2002, the number of residents enrolled in the Seniors' Windrow Program more than doubled from 519 at the beginning of the season to 1100 participants by the end of the winter. The increase made it challenging to ensure adequate resources were in place to service our customers; required continual rerouting of the work; and led to increased frustration for some residents. As a result, a review of the Seniors' Windrow Program has been conducted including:
 - Renewal letter/email
 - Application - in person/online
 - Confirmation of acceptance Letter/Email
 - Frequently Asked Questions brochure
- The current process allows applicants to enroll from August 1 until March 31 of the following year. This year a deadline of October 31 to enroll in the program was promoted. However due to the strike residents are permitted to enroll at anytime throughout the season.
- A hard deadline of October 31 will be implemented for the 2024-2025 season.
- Current levels of service for the seniors' windrow program begins between 24 to 36 hours after the end of a 10cm (4") snowfall.
- For the 2023-2024 season the Town of Whitby is implementing an email notice for the start and end of the Seniors' Driveway Windrow Program. This feature will provide seniors, that are included in the program, with notice of when the snow clearing has started and when it has been completed.
- The 55+ Recreation, Accessibility & Diversity and Communications and Creative Services Departments have enhanced the online experience by updating the Town of Whitby's online "Windrow Snow Program Application Form" making it more user friendly for residents.

F) Weather Forecasting

The Town has engaged in a new three-year contract with MeteoGlobale, a Quebec company that specialises in Road Weather Forecasting. Their Meteo-Routes app is a tool used to anticipate problematic winter weather events and assist the department in the decision-making process for each road classification and offers the following enhancements to our previous service:

- It includes weather forecasting for atmospheric conditions, as well as forecasting for road surface conditions.
- It can be uploaded to mobile devices for staff to view and obtain real time updates of changing weather and road conditions.
- It helps to identify the type of treatment materials needed, spread rates, and will assist with the prioritization of routing across the various road classifications.
- It provides information in real time integrating the Town's own Road Weather Information Station (RWIS) located at Brawley Road.

- A live on-duty meteorologist validates all reports and forecasts.

These additional enhancements will provide real time data to improve the Town's ability for proactive winter maintenance, thereby, increasing efficiency and improved service to residents.

5. Financial Considerations:

The financial impacts of the improvements discussed in this report have been incorporated into the existing operating and capital budgets.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Community Services Staff will work with the Communications and Creative Services Division of Organizational Effectiveness to promote changes in service delivery and key messages related to winter maintenance.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

N/A

8. Strategic Priorities:

The improvements highlighted for the 2023-24 winter maintenance season and the changes to our service delivery for residents, identified within this Report, align with Pillar 4: Whitby's Government - Accountable and Responsive from the Community Strategic Plan, specifically the following objectives:

- Deliver exceptional customer service and community engagement;
- Identify, establish, and report on service levels of interest to the community.

9. Attachments:

N/A