

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - JUNE 16, 2008**

### **WINTER STORM – DECEMBER 16, 2007 - UPDATE**

#### **Recommendation**

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works, the Commissioner of Community Services, the Commissioner of Legal and Administrative Services, and the Deputy City Manager/Commissioner of Finance & Corporate Services, recommend:

That this report be received for information.

#### **Economic Impact**

The impact of producing and distributing the Public Works winter maintenance guide is estimated to be \$15,000, and there are funds in the 2008 Operating Budget to cover this expenditure.

The impact of installing GPS units in sidewalk snow ploughs is estimated to be approximately \$8,000 per year. For the November and December 2008 costs, these will be covered through the existing Operating Budget. However, additional funds will be requested in the 2009 budget to cover off a full year's costs.

#### **Communications Plan**

As part of the overall winter plan, a communications piece will be developed and delivered to residents outlining the levels of service provided by the City for winter maintenance.

#### **Purpose**

To report back on the various initiatives requested by Council as a result of the Committee of the Whole Working Session regarding the December 15 & 16, 2007 storm.

#### **Background - Analysis and Options**

On February 25, 2008, a report was presented to Committee of the Whole outlining the various activities undertaken by both the Public Works Department, and the Parks & Forestry Operations Department. As a result of the report and presentations, Council requested additional information be presented at a later date. This is the follow-up report addressing the concerns and issues.

##### 1. Feasibility of Designating Emergency Snow Routes on Certain City Streets

The City of Vaughan Parking By-law 1-96, Section 4(7)(m) stipulates that no person shall park in such a way as to interfere with traffic or the clearing of snow from the road.

Enforcement Services has conducted a review of staff deployment during snow events, and snow removal operations. As such, on duty staff will respond to calls from plough operators that are being hampered by vehicles on the road during snow clearing operations. In addition, staff will also proactively issue tickets to cars that have been "ploughed in" by the snow ploughs during snow clearing operations.

A check with other York Region municipalities in the area revealed that King, Aurora, Georgina, Richmond Hill, and Markham, also issue tickets for interfere with snow removal using the same criteria as Vaughan.

Likewise in Peel Region, the City of Brampton also issues tickets for interfering with snow removal. Brampton, however, has a policy that stipulates that tickets for these offences are only issued after it has snowed 3.5 inches or more.

This coincides with the threshold of the snowplows being activated. Brampton also tows offending vehicles when tow equipment is available. None of the municipalities spoken to have the stipulation of declaring snow routes or snow emergencies prior to commencing enforcement action.

As the Parking By-law already provides for ticketing for vehicles interfering with snow removal, the designation of "snow emergencies" or "snow routes" is not required. In addition, these designations may actually slow snow removal as enforcement of the bylaw could only start after such designation is made, and then communicated to the public. Council may consider supporting an enforcement policy similar to that in Brampton, whereby Enforcement Services would only ticket during or immediately after snow removal operations.

In order to increase Enforcement Services ability to remove offending vehicles more efficiently an RFP has been issued in an attempt to secure a towing contractor. At this point the process is not complete.

## 2. Communications Plan

### i) Fall Newsletter

As Council is aware, the Greening Vaughan waste management newsletters have been extremely well received, and has contributed to the City winning numerous awards for promotion. As such, it is proposed that Public Works create a similar publication as a guide to winter road maintenance services. This 4 page colour newsletter would be sent out in the Fall to all Vaughan residents, and would:

- Advise residents of the City's approved levels of service
- Inform residents what to expect during and after a snow storm in terms of road ploughing and windrow clearing operations
- Advise residents of the current parking by-law and how it relates to winter snow clearing
- Offer tips with respect to placement of waste and blue boxes during a snow storm
- Outline residents' responsibilities
- Discuss the City's salt management initiatives

Based on the costs to produce and distribute the Greening Vaughan newsletter, it is estimated that such a newsletter would cost approximately \$15,000.

### ii) Phone Response Improvements

In 2001, a dedicated snow hotline phone number was established (905-879-SNOW), along with a mini call centre. The concept was to have a temporary employment agency staff available to come in when required to answer calls related to snow ploughing operations. Although the concept was good, in reality, staffing the phone lines was almost impossible to do. The agency staff and the temporary agencies themselves needed defined working hours, and needed notice well in advance as to when they would be required to provide services. Given the short term employment needs of the snow hotline (24-48 hours after a snow storm), the infrequency of the work, and the inability to provide adequate notice, the snow hot line could not be staffed properly. As a result, the calls simply reverted to the existing staff in Public Works. In addition to the snow hotline, the public also calls the Public Works Department directly.

In March 2008, Access Vaughan approached Public Works and assumed responsibility for the snow hotline. The snow hotline has an automated message and an up to date recording that relays information with respect to snow removal for streets and sidewalks. The information is provided to the Access Vaughan Manager via status update e-mails provided by Public Works. Each time a new update is received, the recording is updated by the Access Vaughan Manager, including weekends and evenings.

During regular business hours when a resident calls the snow hotline or Access Vaughan, the Access Vaughan staff will provide the update to residents. All calls coming into the snow hotline hear the updated recorded message which will provide the same details as the status e-mails provided by Public Works. If the caller stays on the line or presses 0 during regular business hours, the call will be placed into the Access Vaughan queue and will be answered in priority sequence.

If all the Citizen Service Representatives in Access Vaughan are busy, the system will search for an available agent in Public Works. The recording also provides the option for the resident to visit the website for updates.

After business hours, the caller will hear the updated recorded message and then will be prompted to visit the website or contact 911 if they have an emergency situation that requires assistance of Police, Fire or Ambulance services, or stay on the line if they have another emergency to report. The after hours dispatch staff will receive these calls.

Access Vaughan staff are also looking at opportunities to update the after-hours greeting on both the Public Works' and City's main phone lines so that residents calling these lines will hear an updated message with respect to snow clearing operations.

### 3. Improved Service Levels – Road Ploughing

The contract for winter road maintenance services (ploughing/windrow/salting), has been prepared and sent out for tender. The tender closes on May 22, 2008. This tender has been set up to try and address the issues raised by Council with respect to clearing windrows sooner after the main plough has gone by, and takes into account other factors such as growth and anti-icing equipment. It is also set up to reduce the number of contractors that must be dealt with during a winter storm event.

To improve the overall management of the contracts, the bidders must bid to provide the full range of winter maintenance services. With the City being divided into 2 parts for the contract, there is a maximum of two contracts that Roads management staff would have to deal with during a storm (one for each half of the City), and the "buck stops there" in terms of ensuring proper communications between their road ploughing and windrow clearing operations.

To ensure windrows are cleared sooner after the plough goes by, there is a requirement that the two units (plough and windrow), are to be within sight of each other at all times, and start and stop at the same time and location. Unlike the present contracts, there are also financial penalties included in this new contract to cover the cost of missed windrows and streets. GPS units will also be installed in all of the plough and windrow clearing units to help management ensure the windrow clearing units are closer to the ploughs.

In terms of addressing issues about windrows at community mail boxes, we have included that windrows created by road ploughs be cleared at the community mail boxes. This does not mean that the entire area around the mail box will be cleared, nor does it mean that the boxes will be free of snow created by sidewalk ploughing operations. It simply means that there should be no large windrow for residents to step over from the road to get to the boulevard / mail box. This work will be done the day after the residential windrows have been completed.

### 4. Installation of GPS Units in Sidewalk Snow Ploughs

The cost for installing GPS units in all sidewalk ploughing units has been estimated to be \$8,000 per year. This is based on the current fleet size and a monthly lease cost of approximately \$18 per unit for the equipment. Although the winter season is only 5 months long, the lease is based on a 12 month period.

Funds for this activity have not been specifically budgeted for in the 2008 Parks Operating budget, but the costs for November and December should not impact the 2008 budget significantly. Additional funds will be required to cover the full year costs, and these will be requested through the 2009 budget process.

**Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020**

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and ties into Vaughan Vision 2020, specifically with respect to the objective “Pursue Excellence in Service Delivery”.

**Regional Implications**

The recommendations contained in this report do not impact the Region.

**Conclusion**

The changes noted in the area of communications will help improve the levels of service to the residents, and make them better informed as to road ploughing and windrow clearing operations.

Additional GPS units in sidewalk ploughs will assist in better managing the operations and provide a better idea as to completion times.

Based on the existing wording of By-law 1-96, there is no need to create designated snow routes or impose further additional City-wide parking restrictions during snow events.

**Attachments**

N/A

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