SNOW REMOVAL BLOG PART 1: HISTORY OF SNOW REMOVAL CHANGES

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I've written a number of blog posts about snow removal over the years but I want to write a longer post that details some of the notable changes made over the years, what still needs to change in order to improve the service, and when those changes could take effect.

Let's start in 2006 as there were a few important changes made. The first was a change made by the provincial government with regards to environmental regulations. Prior to 2006, snow was permitted to be hauled away and stored in a community green space. This meant that windrows weren't really a concern as we could collect all the snow and easily transport it to a location close by. The change in 2006 requires that all municipalities haul snow to dedicated snow storage sites. The City of Edmonton has 5 designated snow storage locations. I'll talk about how this impacts our budget later in Part 2 of this blog.

The other big change in 2006 was the creation of a policy related to blading streets. A decision was made to complete neighbourhood blading when there was enough snow to create a 10cm snowpack.

In 2011 the policy for neighbourhood blading was updated to start a neighbourhood blading cycle when there was enough snow to create a 5cm snowpack. This was based on engagement that the city did. The feedback they received at the time was that the 10cm snowpack created significant ruts during various freeze/thaw cycles and therefore a smaller snowpack would make it easier to navigate the local roads. Of course the trade-off with this was the creation of larger windrows.

To address the concern of larger windrows, the policy was also updated to require the removal of windrows in front of driveways that were larger than 30cm. Any other windrows would remain but City staff were required to keep driveways clear if those windrows were too large.

Beyond the local roads, there was a policy change in 2015 to better address the arterial roads. I remember this well because I was on council at this point and our previous policy stated that we would only remove windrows on arterial roads when the road was unsafe. There was no definition of unsafe and so I made a motion to change the policy to require the removal of windrows on arterial roads once the lane width was less than 3.2m which is the width of a City bus.

Another change was made around this time related to windrows. While the public feedback for the 2011 changes preferred a larger windrow for a smaller snowpack, there was often concerns related to windrows by schools and the safety issues that would create. The policy was updated to create windrow-free zones beside schools to help increase visibility and safety. Under the current approach, windrows are not left in those designated zones.

A common question that people ask is, “why don’t we have the same level of service as…” and then they would list a city in the country (usually in Eastern Canada). While City staff regularly reviews best practices in other cities, we didn’t always implement the tools that those cities use and we also have a budget that is much lower than those cities with a much larger inventory of roads.

the Henday. I've written about this topic many times over the two year pilot and you can read those blogs using this link. In late-2019, council decided to stop using this solution except on our active pathways (ex: sidewalks, multi-use trails, and bike lanes). The last point on calcium chloride is this was a cost-neutral solution to try and help address icy roads throughout the winter.

A final notable change in 2020 was the addition of a parking ban on local roads when local roads are being bladed. This change was made so that crews could provide better service in a more timely manner. I still have some concerns about the City not actually towing vehicles that haven't moved but I'll cover this more in the next part of this blog.

The City's snow removal budget really hasn't changed over the last 10-15 years. It is important to note that over that same period of time, our city has grown substantially in size which means we have many more kilometres of roads and active pathways to maintain as well as a longer distance for our City crews to cover.

In this post I highlighted some key policy changes that were in our Snow and Ice Control Policy. As the demand for improved service has increased, we exhausted most of our options that don't require an increase to the budget. But with the growth in our footprint as well as the increasing demands for service, we started drafting a new Snow and Ice Policy. Our previous council policy was very prescriptive. While it's important to provide clear targets, having it in a council policy was not the best approach.

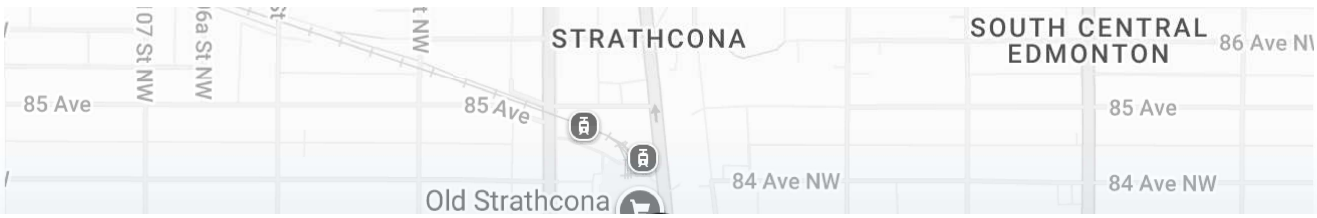
You can review that new Snow and Ice Control Policy using this link. There is a separate City procedure document that specifically details the service standards that you should expect. You can read that using this link.

SNOW REMOVAL BLOG PART 2: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

WINTERBURN ROAD AND WEBBER GREENS DRIVE

We acknowledge that the traditional land on which we reside is in Treaty Six Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as nêhiyaw (Cree), Dené, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. It is a welcoming place for all peoples who come from around the world to share Edmonton as a home. Together we call upon all of our collective, honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.

VISIT OUR OFFICE





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