SNOW REMOVAL BLOG PART 2: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Blog Part 1

Blog Part 2

Blog Part 3

Blog Part 4

Blog Part 5

In Part 1 of this blog I wrote about some of the history of our Snow and Ice Control Policy. In this part, I will offer some possible changes that should occur and the reasons for proposing these changes. I want to start by sharing the feedback I have received over the last 8 years.

Early on in my time on council, I primarily heard about three different issues:

1. Windrows left behind on arterial roads.
2. The ruts that would form on local roads and the accessibility challenges that come from that.
3. The windrows that would be left behind after a neighbourhood blading took place.

The first issue was addressed in the 2015 change and fortunately, I rarely receive emails about this anymore. I can recall fewer than 5 emails being sent to me on this since the policy was changed.

with any snowpack is that it is level for a short period of time but as soon as we have a day or two of warmer weather, those snowpacks quickly turn into ruts and 'brown sugar'. 'Brown sugar' is slushy snow where it's hard to gain traction.

Those conditions on our local roads are challenging for people who drive but they create a situation where it is near impossible to navigate if you do not drive and are using any type of mobility aid. The following is an excerpt from a post I wrote on December 23rd to provide more detail on the pilot for blading down to pavement.

"Neighbourhood Blading on Local Roads

Two days ago I had the opportunity to go out for a daytime bike ride to check out the condition of the local roads in a number of communities in Ward Nakota Isga. I'm usually at City Hall during the day but I wanted to get a better look at the work that was being done on our local roads when it was easier to see.

My bike ride took me through 9 communities. 5 of the 9 communities already had the neighbourhood blading so it gave me a good indication of the conditions of the roads. Generally, I was quite impressed with the quality of work that had occurred. There was a noticeable difference on the roads that were bladed down to pavement and it felt much safer navigating those communities.

There are a few takeaways I want to share as well as some additional detail about why we took the approach to go right down to pavement this time since this is a higher level of service than normal.

1) Do nothing. This is what was happening for the last three winters since there wasn't enough snow to reach a 5cm snowpack.

2) Blade to the 5cm snowpack which has been the approach since about 2011. From 2006-2011, the approach used to be a 10cm snowpack.

3) Blade down to pavement. This is what is happening right now.

4) Do options 2 or 3 and remove the snow.

The best option would be 4 but unfortunately it is cost-prohibitive. A standard neighbourhood blading costs about $1 million and grading down to pavement will likely be about $2-$3 million. Removing the snow costs about $20 million so it prevents us from considering that option in the short-term. While I would like to see a modest increase to the snow removal budget over the coming years, it will take time to reach a point where we can have enough funding for option 4. Therefore, the only location that you will occasionally see the removal of windrows is by schools and in front of driveways where the height of the windrow is greater than 30cm.

Option 2 is the only option that creates two separate issues: windrows and accessibility. This option was originally seen as the middle-ground option but I think we have enough data at this point to show that it doesn't properly resolve either issue. The complaints I would receive every year throughout my first term on council reinforce my concerns with this option. It felt like we never made anyone happy.

Options 1 and 3 each have one issue. Option 1 creates an accessibility issue and Option 3 creates a windrow issue. The accessibility issue in Option 1 is primarily experienced by people who cannot drive. Think about the beginning of winter this year. There was a very heavy snowfall earlier this winter and it resulted in conditions that actually prevented people using different mobility aids from

experience navigating our city in the winter.

The windrow issue in Option 3 also isn't new. Every time we would complete a neighbourhood blading cycle in my first term on council, I would receive emails from people expressing concerns about the windrows left behind. I've also received some emails this time as well as a few comments on Facebook. These windrows are not fun to try and remove if you are looking to make space to park in front of your house instead of on your driveway or in your garage.

Since this happens regardless of whether we use Option 2 or 3, I want to make sure that people know that if you have limited mobility and are eligible for an accessible parking placard, you can request that an accessible parking zone be installed in front of your home by calling 311. Any home with an accessible parking zone in front will not have windrows left in that zone.

Neither are ideal but in weighing those options, I think Option 3 is likely more desirable because ensuring people can safely move throughout the community by foot or mobility aid is the most critical issue. Creating a situation where people can't safely leave their home as we have seen over the years is not a good option. Since we have an option to help those who might struggle with shoveling the windrow ensures that we don't have to trade one accessibility issue for another accessibility issue.

Another reason I like the idea of going down to pavement is because while not every road has a boulevard separating the sidewalk from the road, where they do exist we can store the windrow instead of leaving it on the road.

The other thing I noticed that wasn't as great was that there were a few pedestrian only crossings that weren't properly cleared which didn't create access issues. Fortunately, it wasn't common but I

While I know some people have concerns with the larger windrows, I believe that is a worthwhile trade-off to provide greater accessibility for those who cannot drive. What is nice is that for those that do drive as their primary mode, improving accessibility on our local roads only makes it safer for driving as well."

Since writing this post, we've received even more snow and we actually had to pause the neighbourhood blading work for a few weeks. Now that it has restarted, the windrows left behind are even higher than the communities that were completed in late December. Much of what I wrote in the previous post still stands but there are a few things I would like to acknowledge based on some feedback.

The volume of snow we have received this winter is some of the most we have received in the last 20 years. 2003 and 2011 are the only two other comparable years in the last two decades. The additional size of the windrows is unlike anything we've seen in the last two decades. For those used to parking in front of their homes, it's very challenging to try and move those windrows to your grass. This would be very similar if we had stayed with the 5cm snowpack and leaving the snowpack would again create the issues I wrote about above.

Another common concern I hear about is cars being parked on the street when this work is happening. I was happy that we introduced a parking ban so that crews could work more efficiently but I don't think there has been the level of enforcement that we expect. I saw some ticketing take place but we actually need the cars off the street. I hope that this is the last winter we are lenient with this. As long as we are clearly communicating with everyone when the work is going to be happening, we should then be firm in our enforcement so our crews can do the best job possible.

had a larger fleet, we would be able to have bobcats consistently out in every community addressing issues like this.

So what needs to change? Primarily the budget.

As stated above, I think we need to build the budget up to a point where we can remove windrows. Doing that in one year would require an approximately 1.3% tax increase. If that was the only priority that required more funding, I don't think it would be a big issue. But as we know, there are many other important issues that also require funding. That's why I believe any increase needs to be spread out over a few years. I understand that people want windrows removed and we should make sure we have a budget that allows for that to happen. At a minimum, we should make sure there is enough funding in place to keep the catch basins clear and to ensure that sidewalks are clear of those snow piles.

The point around budget also applies to equipment. I already mentioned the need for more bobcats but it also applies to equipment like belly plows that can also be used to haul away snow. Every cul de sac in the city is cleared by contracted equipment and I believe we need to have at least some equipment in-house so that we aren't exclusively relying on contracted equipment. Finally, we need more specialized equipment. Generally I support the idea of equipment that can be used year-round but considering how long our winter is, having some specialized equipment that allows us to respond more effectively seems reasonable.

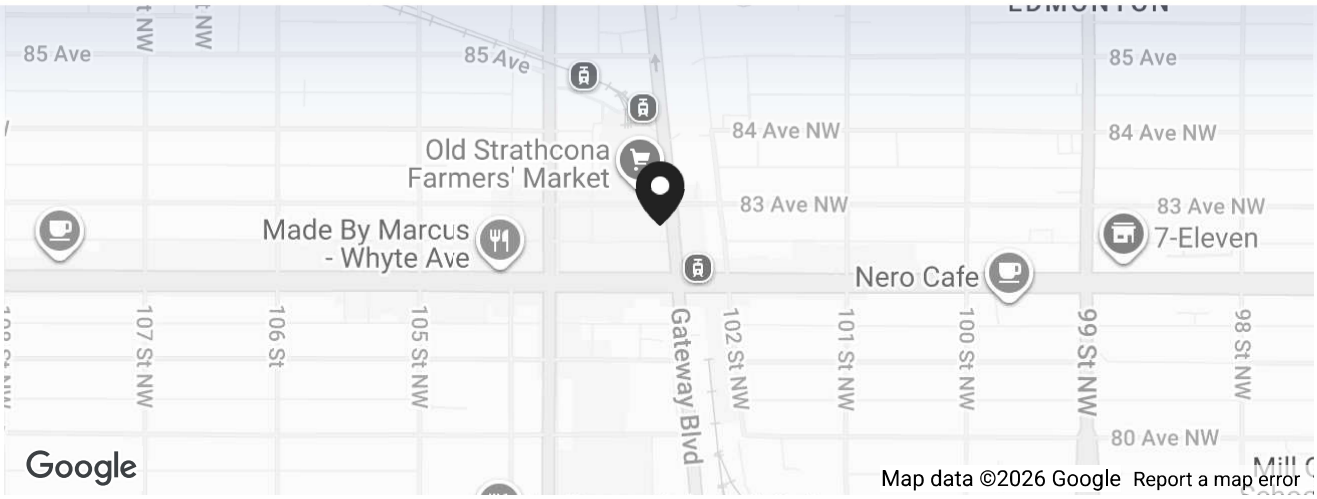
A final change relates to staffing. During that same conversation with Eric Lewis, he mentioned how a majority of our City staff clearing snow are considered temporary or provisional. That means they are typically signed for 11 month contracts and do not get access to the benefits that our full-time employees receive. As you can imagine, this discourages long-term employment and that turnover

This is the current state of our operations and I have highlighted a few changes that still need to be made in this blog post. The last part in this blog series will talk about when some of these changes could take place.

‹ SNOW REMOVAL BLOG PART 3: WHEN FURTHER CHANGES WILL HAPPEN

SNOW REMOVAL BLOG PART 1: HISTORY OF SNOW REMOVAL CHANGES ›

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.



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