Leading the Change for Safer Winter Streets

Moving forward and improving snow and ice removal service requires proper resources, here's how we do it.

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With the lifting of the Phase 2 parking ban on January 23rd and the specialized sno cleaning set to begin, I wanted to address what has been on everyone's mind: the shortfalls in this year's snow clearing, particularly on local roads.

I've heard concerns from many Edmontonians, on the phone, over email, social mec and while I've been out in the community.

The disappointment was valid. Too many people got stuck in ruts and had to rely o the kindness of their neighbours for help. For those with mobility challenges, parts the city became difficult or impossible to navigate. Even now, some sidewalks and trails continue to be difficult to use.

Our city crews worked tirelessly, often for 24-hour stretches in extreme weather. Th was not a failure of effort; it was a failure of capacity and timing.

We need to do better.

Why it took so long to start residential roads

When it starts to snow, the City of Edmonton uses a Snow Clearing Priority Hierar approach with phased priorities.

If you didn't read my post from earlier in January, I'll encourage you to start here: Navigating an Unprecedented Winter: What You Need to Know About Snow Clear in Edmonton. This post is important because it includes information around what t City's current service level is for snow clearing.

Priority 1 determines the City must "maintain to a bare pavement standard within day following the end of snowfall" on main freeways, bus routes, downtown, busine district and hills when we have a snow event. Priorities are determined by factors s as safety, traffic speed and volume, design of infrastructure, road usage, and more.

Priorities must be consistently reset to address the most urgent safety concerns firs

While major routes - freeways, bus routes, downtown, business districts and hills - cleared to bare pavement within one day after a snowfall event, local roads and alle

are only maintained to a 5 cm snowpack and are completed **within 14 days** once a residential blading cycle is initiated.

If it's not initiated, then the local roads will continue to exist in their condition. **Th the part of our current service level that I think needs the most attention.**

When it comes to City-owned sidewalks and all active pathways, the 14 day requirement is too long as it means that people who have limited mobility have a ve challenging time navigating our city safely.

Why this happens?

Our snow-clearing program hasn't kept pace with the outward growth of our city.

For comparison, Montreal maintains roughly 4,100 km of roads on about a $200M program; Edmonton maintains roughly 12,000 km on about $67M. To match Montreal-style removal across our network, our $67 million budget would need to b approximately $585 million per year. You can see these comparisons on a SNOW & ICE database created by Councillor Aaron Paquette.

What about calling in contractors?

In extreme winters like this one, the City of Edmonton calls in contractors to supplement city crews. This year, however, heavy snowfall meant we were competir with private-sector companies and neighbouring municipalities for the same limite hauling capacity - trucks and operators were in short supply across the region, whi also constrained how quickly snow could be removed and hauled away. This is why maintain that the City of Edmonton needs their own larger fleet so we're not in competition with other municipalities and private organizations.

What Actions I Took?

By the first week of January Edmontonians really started to feel the strain of our sn removal process. With each additional snow event, the City of Edmonton had to rev to priority one process ensuring main freeways, bus routes, downtown, business district and hills were clear.

During this time I spoke with the City Manager regularly for updates.

We also explored using the City's Financial Stabilization Reserve to help with extraordinary circumstances. While approximately 350 pieces of equipment were ou every single 12 hour shift (crews work 24/7, 7 days a week), this includes contracted equipment. Work continued to ensure resources were deployed where they were mo needed.

On January 16th, when residential blading was to be paused to work on other areas the city, I spoke with my council colleagues and we agreed that crews be active on residential roads until they were done. I called the City Manager to take the appropriate next steps and crews were diverted to continue residential roads follow their work on alleys and other urgent safety items.

How do we move forward?

Later this year, we will hear from city administration about how the city responded this historic snow fall and their recommendations.

But quite simply, we need to increase the service levels that we currently have and increase our snow clearing budget.

The three priorities I believe will have the greatest impact are:

- Move toward full snow removal on more streets (not just plowing and packing).
- Shorten the time to complete neighbourhood blading after major snow accumulations.

- Improve clearing of sidewalks and active pathways so people with limited mob can travel safely.

Improved service requires proper resources: different equipment for removal and hauling, and more staff to cover a growing roadway network. Our current budget or supports the existing service levels.

In order to deliver better service, the budget needs to change.

There are two ways we can increase the budget for snow and ice removal:

1. Increase the budget through property taxes.
2. Increase the budget through reallocation of other priorities.

During the campaign I promised to set a new budget foundation in 2026 in preparation for our next 4-year budget (2027-2030).

This new budget foundation will be co-created with Edmontonians this year. I will out across the city in the second quarter of 2026 so that we can better understand th priorities of all Edmontonians.

This won't be an easy exercise. There will be significant trade-off discussions takin place to find out which important work we are doing that we should scale down or stop in order to focus on other important work. In a rapidly growing city, we have reached a point where the outward expansion of our city is putting significant financial pressure on service delivery.

These changes are necessary, even if we don't experience the volume of snow we received this year, because it allows for safe mobility no matter how Edmontonians choose how to move.

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Leslie Silver Jan 28

Cut back on bike lanes. To upkeep them during the winter is terrible as I don't see bikers out whe
snowfall is heavy. Why spend the money on clearing the snow away when nobody uses them allo
that money to where it really is needed. I know there is a small percentage that use these bike la
percentages of either people walking or driving is far higher and so you need to adjust for those
people and and the drivers in Edmonton

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gail yakemchuk Jan 28

Please stop the comparisons to Montreal, Ottawa etc. Let's consult with our surrounding municip
that have the same weather patterns and temperature issues.

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