

INSIDE AURORA: Depth Perception

By Scott Johnston

Once again the age old Aurora question has been raised; at what point should the Town start or stop shoveling snow from its roads and sidewalks?

As it seems to do every winter, Council has debated and ultimately declined to approve the removal of windrows, those mountains of snow deposited at the ends of our driveways when the plows go by.

While it would be nice to have that service, and not have to worry about chipping away at the rapidly freezing wall of ice, it would mean another increase in taxes, and no one wants that.

Higher service costs also explain why snow plows don't clear the streets until 8 cm of snow has fallen. Except for Yonge, which get attention once 5 cm has fallen.

5 cm is also the magic number for sidewalks to be cleared.

Aurora is fortunate to have a service that clears all sidewalks. Many neighbouring municipalities do not, or just the main walkways are cleared.

In locations where there is no full service, the residents are responsible for ensuring the sidewalks in front of their properties are cleared in a thorough and timely manner.

That's what I remember where I grew up. Clearing the driveway also meant shovelling the entire length of our sidewalk.

While having the Town do the work sounds wonderful, there are pros and cons to public vs private sidewalk clearing.

If the residents are tasked with the job, it saves tax dollars, and the sidewalks tend to be cleared of snow and ice, even if well below the 5 cm threshold.

On the negative side, it's more work for homeowners. And for those who use the sidewalks, there's no guarantee the homeowners will clear them, at least voluntarily, which necessitates increased enforcement efforts.

With the Town doing the work, it costs more tax-wise, but you're guaranteed clean, sanded sidewalks in a relatively timely manner. Countering this, is that you're guaranteed clean, sanded sidewalks only when snowfall levels reach 5 cm. If less than that falls, it's periculo tuo uti, or use at your own risk.

Sadly, many folks of all ages have no option but to ?risk it? in these circumstances; kids going to school, people exercising or walking their dogs, those trying to reach their super mailbox the list goes on.

I never really thought about this risk until recently when I was out for a stroll in our neighbourhood. A couple of centimetres of snow had fallen, which nicely concealed a large sheet of ice on a depressed slab of sidewalk.

Despite wearing boots with good traction, down I went.

While my wrist broke my fall, my fall broke my wrist.

Although I did break a bone in my hand, on the ?ouch? and recovery scale, I was fortunate that it wasn't as bad as it could have been. Plus I got to meet all the nice folks at the fracture clinic at Southlake (really, they're great people).

This experience got me thinking about two things. First, many thanks to those who altruistically shovel and sand or salt their sidewalks for the benefit of their neighbours each snowfall, whether there's enough ?official? snow for the plows to be out or not. Secondly, it made me ponder the standards that are in place in Town for snow removal, whether it be for sidewalks, roadways or windrows.

While we all want to see these services improved, such as all windrows being cleared, or the plows being out on the roads and sidewalks as soon as snow starts to accumulate, and not only after several centimetres have fallen, doing so comes at a financial cost, and no one is a fan of that.

But not improving them has other types of costs, as well, as I've now experienced first-hand, so to speak.

With no clear right or wrong, and arguments for both sides, this explains why such things as windrow removal and snow clearing standards are debated every year in Aurora, and likely will be each winter for years to come.

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