

Overnight snow removal pilot coming for Yonge Street

By Brock Weir

Daytime snow removal in Yonge Street's historic core has been creating headaches for local businesses and commuters alike, but a pilot program to shift these activities overnight could create headaches for people trying to get a good night's sleep.

These were concerns raised by local lawmakers last week surrounding a new program which, if ratified by Council this week, could see snow removal on Aurora's busiest thoroughfare, from Church Street to Catherine Avenue, earmarked from midnight through to the early morning hours.

“Current practices of removing accumulated snow from Yonge Street during business hours creates disruption for local merchants and potential public safety and traffic conflicts,” said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations, in his report to Council. “The need to remove accumulated snow from the curb lane on Yonge Street has been an ongoing routine service. This was necessary as there is now snow storage space on Yonge Street and once the accumulated snow from previous road and sidewalk events becomes sufficient enough to cause conflict to both motorists and pedestrians, the snow must be removed.

“For many years staff and equipment have been deployed to conduct this snow removal operation during the daytime hours which can be challenging due to the nature of the operation and coping with the volume of traffic and pedestrian activity that can normally be expected during this time of day. Snow removal requires that the curb lane be closed to the flow of traffic and parking and it also requires that a tractor plow be working on the traveled portion of the sidewalk. Staff operators must exercise extreme caution at all times during this operation as high volumes of traffic and the presence of pedestrians increases the inherent risks of an unwanted incident.”

Moving snow removal to night time would, he said, reduce impacts and risk to motorists, pedestrians and business owners, while making the job more efficient, but there is a caveat: it will create additional noise and disturbances for a time that could result in complaints from people who live above the Yonge Street retail outlets and in surrounding neighbourhoods.

“That means the residents in that area are going to be subjected to noise from midnight until whenever they're finished,” said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. “I really don't think that is appropriate. I know it doesn't happen that often at the moment, but depending on how the weather progresses we may have this more often.”

This issue was the very reason the matter was before Council, contended Mr. Downey, who said his department can proceed with the project but the potential for residents' concerns promoted them to seek the green light from Council.

“We want to make sure we communicate this as much as we possibly can before we go off and do this operation when Council endorsing us going out at night feeling there might be some concerns raised,” he said, noting that a report would be brought back after this winter season to see whether or not this practice should continue.

“It is a much more effective way of removing snow at night. We aren't dealing with traffic, we aren't dealing with pedestrians, we can actually close off a portion of the road without disrupting any store operations on Yonge Street. There are a number of benefits, but if you are living in one of those apartments along the store fronts on Yonge Street, we believe you will be disturbed for a certain period of time, although it will be something moving along Yonge Street, but there will be a period of time where it will be disruptive.

“We're either going to be disrupting traffic, and store operations, and the public, and cars, and parking during the day, or we're going to be disrupting people sleeping in the evening. One way or the other we will do disruption.”

Mayor Geoff Dawe also voiced his reservations, reiterating that should this go forward it should only be viewed as a pilot program.

“Maybe we could find another time,” he offered. “If we try it and there are a lot of complaints, we have an option to move.”