

Snow contract to be reviewed following sidewalk clearing complaints

Town Hall is set to review existing contracts with snow plowing services after the slow removal of sidewalk snow following a wintery blast between March 3 and 4.

Residents' concerns and those of local lawmakers were raised at last week's General Committee meeting, where Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said that although Council members get regular updates from staff, a review of service standards may be warranted.

We are disappointed in the performance of the contractor ourselves, said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations, at the March 7 meeting. There is a review process ongoing on all contracts, not only this contract but every contractor, and we put performance reviews as part of that process and actions can be taken depending on the severity of those issues. There are also penalties within the contract that we have been imposing and have imposed not only this storm but previous storms, so we continue to monitor the contractor's performance and assess appropriate penalties for not meeting certain obligations.

As of last week's meeting, sidewalks still had not been completely cleared, meaning that the significant weather event declared on March 3 stretched into last week.

We will be working with our contractor and through our procurement division with regards to what we feel are appropriate steps forward in ensuring that we don't have a repeat performance, said Downey.

While Councillor Weese raised concerns about sidewalk clearing, he said primary and secondary roads were done very well and very quickly and it just seems like the residual problems that occurred in various spots throughout the communities.

I'm glad to hear that you're going through that review and I will be happy to hear what the results are, and the residents would be happy as well, he said.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said that while there were issues, staff responded quickly to Council members when they received complaints from residents.

A suggestion she put forward was giving priority to clearing sidewalks in school zones those that really are connected or close to proximity to schools.

If we are in this situation again with the sidewalks that by the schools and the streets that would feed into it directly, that should be first priority, she said.

Downey said that was indeed something that could be looked at in the future.

Compounding the issue, the Director added, is a shortage of equipment on the part of the contractor. Aurora has seven sidewalk routes for the contractor, he said, with seven machines ready to tackle the snow, but when the storm in question hit six of the seven apparatus were down.

They only have one machine that is part of the contract, and it has a GPS on it, so one of our complications is we have no idea where they are or where they have been, said Downey. We are sending staff out on an ongoing basis through the community just to find out where our issues are. We're happy to send staff out and have a look at some of those school routes, but I can't sit here right now and tell you they are done or they are not done because I haven't got sufficient information through our GPS in order to do that because they haven't got those machines up and running in Aurora right now. They have alternative devices removing snow.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter