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TO: Public Works and Infrastructure Committee and Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee

DESTINATAIRE : Comité des travaux publics et de l'infrastructure et Comité de l'agriculture et des affaires rurales

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FILE NUMBER: ACS2025-PWD-RPS-0004

SUBJECT: Private Laneway Contractors

OBJET : Entrepreneurs privés de déneigement des allées

PURPOSE

At the April 17, 2024, Council meeting, Councillor Brown moved a motion ([Motion No. 2024-34-05](#)) that directed staff to perform a municipal scan in Canada, or other comparable jurisdictions, to determine if public partnerships involving private laneway clearing vehicles complementing municipal plows on clearing residential roads have been explored. Staff were also directed to complete an internal review of the operational feasibility and legal permissibility of integrating such a service into the City's established Maintenance Quality Standards and current operational practices. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the results of staff's review.

BACKGROUND

The City of Ottawa's winter operations are managed by Roads and Parking Services (RPS) within the Public Works Department (PWD). Winter operations and maintenance of Ottawa's transportation network includes snow clearing, snow removal, and the application of salt and grit. These efforts ensure that sidewalks, roads, pathways, and the winter cycling network remain safe and passable for both residents and visitors. The transportation network in Ottawa is expansive and is made up of over 13,000 lane kilometers of road, 2,550 kilometers of sidewalks, 285 kilometers of the Transitway and Highway 174, and 60 kilometers of winter maintained cycling lanes.

RPS is dedicated to delivering high-quality winter maintenance services that provide safe, dependable and affordable service levels, while consistently surpassing the province's Minimum Maintenance Standards. To maintain a reliable and appropriate level of service for all residents, the City's [Maintenance Quality Standards](#) were established and approved by the Council in 2003. The standards outline the time and extent of maintenance activities (snow clearing, material application and snow removal) that will be performed on the transportation network. Snow clearing on roadways follows a prioritized system based on road classification. Clearing operations begin with Highway 174 and the Transitway, next are major roads and arterials, followed by the clearing of secondary roads and minor collectors, and finally, residential roadways. Specifically, the City's MQS states that for Class 5 - residential roads and lanes, the following standards apply:

- Residential roads to be maintained to a snow packed surface
- Plows deployed after a minimum of 7 centimeters (10 centimeters for lanes) of snow accumulation
- Snow to be cleared within 10 hours (16 hours for lanes) after the end of snow accumulation

RPS uses both in-house and contracted staff to perform winter operations with approximately 545 operators and 575 pieces of winter equipment (owned, leased, and contracted) that are used to clear and treat the City of Ottawa's extensive transportation network. The City of Ottawa contracts snow clearing companies to create a balance in operations during periods that require extra resources to meet the Winter Maintenance Quality Standards. Contractors are often responsible for both snow clearing and snow removal. Currently, RPS does not use private laneway contractors to clear snow on City roads.

The City of Ottawa offers a high-level of service when it comes to winter maintenance. In 2023 staff provided a response to an inquiry brought forward by Councillor Dudas, [Comparison of Snow Removal Service Standards](#), which asked for a comparison of winter maintenance standards for the City of Ottawa and other Canadian municipalities with comparable size and weather. Overall, Ottawa's winter maintenance standards stood out as being amongst the highest, sometimes significantly so. On residential roads, Ottawa has 10 hours to complete clearing after an event, Halifax has 24 hours and Edmonton 5 days. Montreal did not give a timeframe for clearing their roads and instead say that they will continue until the streets are cleared and safe. While no city will be the same as Ottawa when it comes to climate, infrastructure, geography, population and individual community needs, overall, Ottawa's winter maintenance compares favorably when compared to other Canadian cities.

The Maintenance Quality Standards provide operations with service level standards, however, how staff meet those standards are guided by operational practices. Although the standards in Ottawa are amongst the highest when compared to other Canadian municipalities, staff are regularly reviewing, adjusting and enhancing operational practices to meet the standards in changing weather conditions. In 2019 staff underwent a Service Delivery Review, with a subsequent report ([ACS2019-PWE-RPS-0015](#)) to Council on November 27, 2019. Through the Service Delivery Review there were many improvements to operational practices, including equipment, technology, scheduling, staff training and enhanced communications. Specific to residential roads, staff made adjustments to respond more aggressively and proactively to smaller weather events earlier in the season to minimize potential snow accumulation, packed-on snow and ice buildup. This is evident when comparing the 2018-2019 weather that prompted this review to a similar heavy weather event winter season in 2022/2023. Both winters saw similar conditions with almost identical snow accumulation, freezing rain hours and freeze-thaw cycles, but with the improvements made through the Service Delivery Review there was a 42 per cent reduction in service requests.

DISCUSSION

In response to Councillor Brown's motion, staff conducted a municipal scan, followed by a feasibility study to determine the practicability of utilizing private laneway contractors to clear snow on residential roads. For the purposes of this report, the term “laneway” refers to a residential private driveway or entranceway. The results of the municipal scan and feasibility study are explained in detail below.

Municipal Scan

The objective of the municipal scan was to determine if other Canadian municipalities use private laneway snow-removal contractors to assist with snow-clearing operations on city-maintained roadways.

Staff developed a five-question survey aimed at determining whether municipalities use private contractors for snow removal on laneways, and if so, to gather insights on their experiences, lessons learned, necessary considerations, resource requirements, and any concerns or challenges they have faced. The five questions provided to the municipalities were as follows:

1. To your knowledge, has your jurisdiction explored using private laneway contractors to clear residential roads?
2. If so, what lessons have been learned?
3. What considerations would staff identify as being relevant to contemplate prior to approving such an arrangement?
4. Given those considerations, what additional budgetary/staffing requirements/training/technology/expertise, if any, would you anticipate be required within your organization to deliver such a program?
5. Please state and briefly explain any concerns that come to mind with this type of arrangement.

The survey was shared with 17 municipalities across Canada, with ten municipalities responding to the survey, including: Barrie, Sudbury, Kingston, Montreal, Moncton, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge.

Of the ten responses received, none of the municipalities currently use private laneway contractors to assist in snow-clearing on city-maintained roadways, however, many of the municipalities shared their thoughts and feedback regarding the potential use of private laneway contractors, including costs, equipment specifications, levels of service and meeting minimum maintenance standards, tracking and monitoring work, scheduling coordination, and insurance.

Feasibility Study

Staff also conducted an internal review to assess the feasibility of incorporating this service into the City's existing Maintenance Quality Standards and current operational practices. As part of this review, RPS staff reached out to local contractors requesting an approximate cost estimate for residential road segments per snow event.

In assessing the viability of using private laneway contractors in Ottawa, four key areas were considered: Operational, Financial, Administrative and Logistical and Legal. The results of this study are outlined below.

Operational Considerations

To clear snow from residential neighbourhoods, RPS staff utilize large equipment such as graders and loaders, outfitted with a plow blade and wing to effectively plow and scrape away snow and ice from road surfaces. As a result of the Service Delivery Review, staff are now responding more aggressively and proactively to smaller weather events, earlier in the season, to minimize potential snow accumulation and packed-on snow and ice buildup. Graders and loaders are specifically designed to plow, scrape and cut ice efficiently to clear roadways. Following snow clearing, a second piece of equipment, with material spreading capabilities, is often deployed to apply de-icing materials such as salt and grit.

In contrast, the equipment used by private laneway contractors differs significantly from municipal machinery. These contractors often rely on smaller units equipped with blowers, which allows them to blow the snow from the driveway to the nearby property. This method typically results in a snow and ice packed surface. Additionally, a standard blower can only clear a width of about 7.5 feet of snow, whereas the equipment used by the City can clear a width of almost double that at 14 feet; and, most private contractor units are not equipped with material spreading attachments for salt or grit application.

Changing the current operational processes to include private laneway contractors by having them complete a first clearing pass on residential roads would result in an additional step in the operation, as City plows would still need to return to the residential streets to further clear the snow and ice to the appropriate condition and width, and then to apply material.

Financial Considerations

Many municipalities have also raised concerns about the impact on their winter maintenance budgets, recognizing that outsourcing of additional snow-clearing services would result in higher annual costs for the city. As part of the feasibility review, RPS

staff reached out to six local private laneway contractors to obtain preliminary cost estimate for clearing residential roadways. Three responses were received, with quoted rates ranging from \$1,500 to \$7,000 per kilometer. Given that the City of Ottawa maintains approximately 2,987 kilometers of residential roads, the estimated cost per snow event would range from approximately \$4.4million to as much as \$20 million if private contractors were used to conduct an initial clearing pass. These findings suggest not only considerable variability in pricing among contractors, but also indicate that interest in undertaking such work may be limited in the private sector.

As outlined in the Operational Considerations section, even if private contractors were to complete an initial pass, larger City or contracted equipment would still be required to perform full clearing and material application. In addition, existing contracted services are currently experiencing rising costs, particularly in insurance premiums. Given these trends, along with the City's extensive road network and ongoing residential growth, the overall cost of implementing such a program would be expected to increase over time.

Procurement and Contract Administration Considerations

To introduce a new type of road clearing would also have several administrative and logistical challenges. Procurement could become more complicated, with uncertainties regarding the tendering process. For example, there may be questions about whether tenders will be issued by street, village, or area, and it could require selecting multiple companies based on the specific parts of the city they serve or not having enough contractors interested in servicing certain areas of the City. Managing multiple contractors, coordinating their snow-clearing schedules, and monitoring and documenting performance would require significant supervision and additional resources. Furthermore, the coordination of these contractors with city plows would be time-consuming, particularly during major snow events, which may negatively impact service levels. Finally, although the City aims to provide consistent services across the city, variations in snow-clearance times across streets may lead to resident dissatisfaction and increased service requests.

Legal Considerations

Staff in the Office of the City Solicitor, highlighted key concerns regarding the legal aspects of utilizing private laneway contractors to work on city streets, specifically noting that contractors may lack the necessary training to meet the City's standards which could have legal implications for the City, and the importance of providing appropriate training for all contracted staff such as training on Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS), MQS protocols, health and safety regulations, and operator instruction - and the considerable time and financial resources required for each.

Specific to insurance, there was concern regarding the availability of coverage for private laneway contractors expanding into city road clearing and whether available coverage would be cost prohibitive. City road clearing could be viewed as a “higher risk” compared to private laneways, and/or a lack of experience clearing public roads could cause a significant increase in premiums. Also, the acquisition of new or more coverage necessary to meet the City’s recommended insurance coverage requirements – \$5 million commercial general liability (CGL), \$5 million auto (rated specifically for snow clearing on public roads), and property coverage for their equipment – could result in additional premiums, which for contractors, could make the cost of insurance too expensive to justify the additional risk.

CONCLUSION

The equipment used by private laneway operators would require City snow clearing equipment to return to further clear the snow and ice to the required conditions and width, and to spread materials. The rising costs of contracted services, including insurance premiums, and the added administrative costs of managing such a service, would result in a substantial increase in costs. A municipal scan of Canadian cities demonstrated that no other municipality utilizes private laneway contractors, and many shared concerns with implementing such a process including the cost to using private laneway contractors, equipment specifications, levels of service, meeting minimum maintenance standards, tracking and monitoring work, scheduling coordination, and insurance. Given these considerations, the use of private laneway contractors for clearing residential roads is not recommended by Roads and Parking Services.

Roads and Parking Services is committed to delivering essential services to the community and take pride keeping in the Nation’s Capital safe, healthy, clean, and green. Operations are based on service excellence and continuous improvement. Past improvements, through the Service Delivery Review, resulted in staff responding more aggressively and proactively to smaller weather events, earlier in the season, to minimize potential snow accumulation, packed-on snow and ice buildup on residential roads. Staff will continue to regularly review maintenance standards, operational practices, and service delivery, identify innovations and efficiencies, and implement incremental improvements to ensure that winter operations continue to meet the evolving needs of residents, businesses, and tourists.

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