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STAFF REPORT: Infrastructure and Public Works



REPORT TO: Committee of the Whole
MEETING DATE: May 16, 2016
REPORT NO.: CSPW.16.061
SUBJECT: Load and Haul Snow from Business District - Level of Service Review
PREPARED BY: Jim Mc Cannell, Manager of Roads and Drainage

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CSPW.16.061 entitled “Load and Haul Snow from Business District - Level of Service Review”,

AND THAT Council directs Staff to continue with the current level of service for the commercial areas of Thornbury, Clarksburg and Craigeith.

B. Background

The Town has received concerns that the Business District of Thornbury was not cleared of snow in a timely manner in response to a snow storm that happened in the early morning hours of Wednesday March 2, 2016. The Town received approximately 45 cm of snow.

The Town’s practice has been to load and hauled snow from the following areas.

- i. Bruce Street from Louisa to King,
- ii. Bruce Street North around Harbour View Resort
- iii. Arthur Street at the right turn lane, at TD bank
- iv. Arthur Street from Bruce to Hester Street
- v. Beaver River Bridge
- vi. Author Street at Mill Street Intersection
- vii. Louisa Street W from Bruce Street to Hester Street
- viii. Louisa Street W from Bruce Street to laneway
- ix. Hester Street parking lot
- x. Post Office Parking lot
- xi. The BVO parking lot
- xii. The Corner of Bruce Street and Alice Street
- xiii. The Corner of Bruce Street and Cr 113
- xiv. The Clarksburg Community sign
- xv. Intersection at Marsh and Hillcrest
- xvi. Marsh Street from Clark Street to the Bridge
- xvii. Jozo Weider from BMR Inn to Village
- xviii. Canning Drive at Plunge Intersection.
- xix. Canning Drive at Bus Stop Layby (SBL) and Big Baby lay-by

Since the County pays for 50% of snow hauling costs to maintain the parking stalls and the travel lanes at full width along Marsh St and Bruce Street south of Arthur Street (GR13), the Town is required to receive permission for the County prior to starting snow removal operations albeit in the past this permission has not been refused.

The snow is stored in the Town's yard on King Street for Thornbury and on lands off Grey Road 19 for Craigleith. Arrangements will have to be made to find an alternative snow storage facility since the current site in Craigleith has been sold.

With respect to the storm of March 2nd, Town Staff and contractors were fully occupied until the end of day Thursday March 3rd clearing roads and sidewalks, cleaning up intersections and pushing back snow banks to improve sightlines to bring the traffic infrastructure to a safe condition.

Snow from both the traveled portion of the road and the sidewalk was piled on the boulevard in the commercial areas. By Thursday afternoon the snow piled on the boulevards was spilling out onto the parking spaces along Bruce Street. Once the road becomes narrowed by the snow, there are safety concerns for cars traveling along Bruce Street. To address this concern, on the morning of Friday March 4th between 3 and 6 am, Town Staff cleared the parking stalls along Bruce Street using a backhoe. Snow was removed from the road way and moved to the Hester Street parking lot until it was hauled away on Monday evening. At completion, the parking stalls and traveled portion of the road were at full width.

Staff are aware of the expectations of the area businesses to have the snow removed as soon as possible once it begins to impact parking and pedestrian movements. On Thursday March 3 Staff discussed the options internally for removing snow in the business areas. The following key challenges were identified:

- i. Hours of Work legislation limits the amount of time workers are available before prescribed rest periods are mandated. This applies to both Town Staff and contractor's employees. Staff are diligent to ensure that Town and contracted operators receive the minimum rest periods and do not exceed their maximum hours of work. The Town's snow removal contractor has other snow plowing contracts and their operators were as busy as Town Staff providing service to their other clients. Generally, snow removal operations can't commence until a minimum of 24 hours after a snow event ends to "reset" the clocks of the operators. Once the Town Operators had stopped plowing snow, they are required to have 10 hours off (without driving) in order to allow them 8 hours of rest time. The earliest that Staff would have been able to work again was Friday during the day. For Town Staff to be able to work overnight into Saturday morning, they would have needed to be sent home during their regular shift and paid for the day. Because of this change in work patterns and increased costs for overtime, this work is contracted out. In the event of a second snow event, the Town would not have sufficient Staff available to operate plow equipment. In addition, the Town does not have the required loading and hauling equipment easily available. The backhoe is too small and the Landfill loader is not easily moved into Town.

- ii. Loading and hauling snow on Friday and Saturday evenings is problematic and has proven not efficient. Crews are not able to work around the traffic and patron cars that are parked on the road until the early morning hours. Operators worry about hitting a vehicle and have to work very carefully around pedestrians. A snow removal shift typically starts around 8 to 9 pm while cars and pedestrians on weekends are in the area until the early hours of the morning. Crews must return to complete their work in areas where the cars are parked thus driving up costs due to the inefficiency. Even though the Town can tow cars after 2 am, a car towed away from the restaurants leads to other problems and does not place the Town in a good light.

It was for these reasons that Staff decided the best course of action was to wait until Monday to haul snow. Staff contacted a Thornbury BIA representative to let them know of the Town's intention and it was received with understanding the challenges.

Contracted crews mobilised the evenings of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to remove snow. Crews began in areas with less traffic (parking lots and side streets) around 8 pm. Once the traffic volumes dropped off, crews moved out onto County Road 13 and Arthur Street (Hwy 26).

This work is expected to take place overnight; the overtime premium is factored into the tendered price. There is no additional cost for working on a weekend but crews are generally not permitted to work over the weekend due to the inefficiencies of working around traffic.

Experience of Area Municipalities

In response to the concerns over the Town's response time, Staff contacted the area municipalities to understand their response to the storm. Their experience is provided below.

Owen Sound:

Owen Sound is the only one contacted that has a written Standard Operating Policy.

**Council Resolution No. R-121015-025 – October 15/12 By-law No. 2013-219 NEW: REVISED: X Nov. 18/13
Class 2 (Downtown core)**

Following the completion of post storm clearing operations the Public Works Road Superintendent will assess the volume of snow storage in the Downtown Core to ensure a reasonable volume of snow storage remains while considering parking meter accessibility and safe access to the sidewalk from the metered parking locations. If required, the removal of snow will normally begin 24 hours after post storm plowing operations have been completed. Removal operations will typically be completed between 12:00 am and 7:00 am

City Staff explained the City will initiate snow removal when the banks are greater than 1m and expected to rise due to more snow in the forecast. City Staff utilizes 3 sidewalk plows, a road grader, and a loader with a 250 H.P. front mounted snowblower along with 12 dump trucks for snow removal. Only the trucks are contracted. The rest of the equipment is Town owned and operated. A City Foreman is the on-site supervision and coordination. During the recent snow event, City crews worked Friday into Saturday morning.

Grey Highlands (Markdale):

The municipality utilised their own crews and equipment and paid overtime. The crew worked Friday and Saturday morning.

Meaford:

The municipality completed snow removal in the main downtown core with their own forces. Work started at 3 am and worked until approximately 6am at which time the parking was allowed on street. The municipality will use contractors as well if circumstances warrant.

As a general rule, Meaford will initiate snow removal when the snow banks are 1.0 to 1.5m high. Other considerations are pending weather – more snow coming or warmer temperatures and ensuring the storm sewer system is free and clear to accept melt water. As well, any upcoming special events are taken into account.

Collingwood:

Collingwood hires 2 skid steers, 1 loader and several trucks from a pool of local contractors. In addition, they utilise one of their own plow trucks to push snow across the road to have the loader lift into the haul trucks. In the recent snow event, the work occurred Thursday night and Friday morning. In addition to the plow truck operator, two additional Town Staff were on site. Otherwise, the workers were contracted.

Comparison to The Blue Mountains

The notable difference between the Town and the neighbouring municipalities is that those contacted either used their own forces or acted as the constructor for the work by directly coordinating contacted workers. The Town on the other hand hired a contractor to perform all work including establishing and monitoring traffic control and ensuring all work was done in accordance with Health and Safety and Ministry of Labour regulations. By fully contracting out the work, the Town separates itself from the risk of being the constructor and making sure all workers are compliance with relevant legislation.

Level of Service

The loading and hauling of snow from the boulevards from the Business Areas is to promote the safe and efficient operation of the road, parking areas and sidewalk. The boulevard is designed and used for a certain amount of snow storage – usually about 1m high bank. The removal of snow improves the abilities of pedestrians to access parked cars, vehicular sightlines and reduces icing on the sidewalks and road during freeze/ thaw events.

The response time to loading and hauling snow is a level of service question. A reduction in response time to address a specific snow event will come at a cost. That cost may be additional staff time, contractor premium costs, a reduction in the level of service elsewhere or a combination of all.

The key challenge to decreasing the time between a snow event ends and the loading and hauling snow can begin is resourcing. To avoid running into the hours of work limits and mandatory rest periods is having unused Town or contractor operators available. Since the Town doesn't currently have the type of equipment available needed to efficiently haul snow and the work is sporadic, the loading and hauling of snow is best contracted. Local contractors that are able to load and haul snow will also plow or haul snow during winter events. The ramification is that the contractor's workers – not unlike Town Staff - are not able to start hauling snow until they have been able to a chance to reset their hours of service. The pool of contractors available to do snow removal is shallow and as such, other contractors are not available to draw upon. Historically, snow removal operations have not been able to take place in less than 24 hours after a major snow event has ended. In order to have a quicker response time the Town would require a contractor that is not otherwise fully occupied with a snow plowing operation. Generally, a contractor that is not in the snow removal business does not keep men and equipment employed and licensed for short term work, and as a result is not usually available without paying a premium.

In order to increase the snow loading and hauling level of service, the options available to the current situation are: i) the Town could hire equipment and operators as available and manage removal directly or ii) strict performance requirements with an incentive / disincentive clause to ensure that the contractor responds within a given time period.

Town Hired Equipment and Operators:

Under this option the Town would have to marshal whatever equipment and operators are available. The Town would become the constructor and as such would be responsible for the health and safety of all workers and the liability of undertaking the work. The Town would need to ensure that the workers have satisfied the Hours of Work requirements and are qualified to undertake the work. Depending on who is available and the Town's experience with that person, it may prove a challenge to ensure their qualifications on short notice. Given the Town's location and availability of local contractors, there will be a cost premium to bring contractors in from further afield. There is also the overall availability of contractors to consider. If snow removal is required within the Town, snow removal is also very likely required in neighbouring municipalities as well.

Enhanced Contractor Performance Requirements:

The contract for loading and hauling snow could be tightened and enhanced to require the contractor to be ready to provide equipment and workers within a set time period following the end of a snow event regardless of the day of the week or their other obligations. If the performance requirement is not achieved, liquidated damages could be applied provided the damages can be quantified. Another option is to impose an acceleration/delay cost such that the contractor achieves a bonus if the work is accomplished ahead of a time, and vice versus, is assessed a cost reduction if the snow is not removed within a set time. These clauses by their nature will limit the number of local contractors who will respond to the tender and/or will result in a cost premium to be applied. The added costs are difficult to estimate until a tender is closed. A contract of this nature would have additional administration costs to track response times and completions schedules. These works generally occur outside of regular working hours and will result in a shift premium for Town Staff. In order to facilitate this change the current contract would have to be canceled. The Town has that flexibility in the contract terms. The final contract extension of the current contract will terminate on April 15th of 2018.

Cost Implications

The Town currently budgets \$18,000 for loading and hauling snow. This has historically allowed for two full rounds of snow removal each winter. Often the main streets of Clarksburg and Thornbury will have snow removed a third time towards the end of the winter to help reduce icing on the sidewalks. Over the last 2 winters the average cost to load and haul snow (in Thornbury and Clarksburg) has been \$7,200 per event. This budget item has not increased in many years in order to control the winter maintenance budget. This does not include any work in cul-de-sacs.

The Town's snow dumps are limited in size. If the amount of snow removed is increased by two or more events annually, the Town may need to find additional snow storage space. This space needs to be close by because as the trucking distance gets longer, the need for additional trucks increases thereby driving up costs.

Recommendation

Staff is recommending to continue with the current level of service for the commercial areas of Thornbury, Clarksburg and Craighleith. It has been recognized that large winter storm events, especially ahead of a weekend, can cause an inconvenience. The current level of service that is provided is appropriate for the budget that is available.

Alternatives

There are several ways that additional service can be provided. It is possible to increase the frequency or the number of times or snow is removed from the boulevard. This would see the snow being haul away more often over the winter. A possible recommendation is provided below. See Alterative Recommendation #1

Another way to increase the service level is to increase the response time after a significant snow event. Both methods could trigger the need for additional snow storage facilities. In addition the County may question paying for 50% of any enhanced service for snow removal activities and this would need to be investigated by Staff. See Alternative Recommendation #2

Alternative Recommendation #1

THAT Council directs staff to increase the budget for Loading and Hauling snow to \$40,000 from \$18,000 to allow for additional snow removal by the current Contractor and develop a capital sheet to allow for the creation of a larger snow storage facility based on MOE guidelines, and that Staff confirm with the County the continued funding of 50% of snow removal costs.

Alternative Recommendation #2

THAT Council directs Staff to cancel the current contract and establish a service contract for an enhanced performance standard for the removal of snow from commercial areas within 24 hours of the average snow bank exceeding 1m in height. This would include the load, haul and disposal of snow. And that Staff confirm with the County the continued funding of 50% of snow removal costs.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan

This report furthers the Town of The Blue Mountain's Strategic Plan Goal #5: Ensure that our Infrastructure is Sustainable

D. Environmental Impacts

The use of heavy equipment produces greenhouse gases, the Contractor will be asked to participate in the Town's anti idling policy.

The creation of a new snow storage facility is believed to be exempt from the requirement of an Environmental Assessment if the new facility follows the Guidelines on Snow Disposal and De-icing Operation in Ontario.

E. Financial Impact

Additional snow removal operations will increase the current budget of \$18,000 to \$40,000.

The cost of land and the construction of a snow storage facility is unknown at this time.

F. In Consultation With

None.

G. Attached

None

Respectfully submitted,

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