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Item No. 12.1.2
Transportation Standing Committee
February 25, 2021

TO: Chairperson and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: - Original Signed -

Denise Schofield, Executive Director, Parks & Recreation

- Original Signed -

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: January 20, 2021

SUBJECT: **Winter Maintenance to Walking Paths in Regional Parks**

ORIGIN

February 27, 2020, motion of the Transportation Standing Committee:

That the Transportation Standing Committee request a staff report that investigates the advantages, disadvantages, and costs of providing winter maintenance to walking paths in regionals parks such as Sir Sandford Fleming Park that currently do not receive winter maintenance.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter 2008, c. 39,

s.320 (1), s. 320 (2) and s. 320 (3) confers legislative authority for Council to make by-laws relating to snow and ice removal.

s. 322 (3) The Council may expend funds for the purpose of clearing snow and ice from streets, sidewalks and public places in all, or part, of the Municipality.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

1. Add Sir Sandford Fleming Park Seawall Pathway to the regional park pathways that are winter maintained in 21/22 winter works season;

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2. Approve the Park Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines (Attachment 2) for all regional park pathways receiving winter maintenance;
3. Include the paving of main pathways in Sandy Lake Park, First Lake Regional Park and Africville Park for consideration in the 2022/23 capital budget deliberations to further winter maintenance capabilities; and
4. Undertake a review of the park pathways and guidelines in 5 years in association with the review of Transportation and Public Works winter operations service review standards previously approved by Council.

BACKGROUND

HRM's Regional Plan outlines that "The primary objective of a regional park is to preserve and protect significant natural or cultural resources. The essential features of a regional park may include, but are not be limited to, open space, wilderness, scenic beauty, flora, fauna, and recreational, archaeological, historical, cultural and/or geological resources. A Regional Park will have sufficient land area to support outdoor recreational opportunities for the enjoyment and education of the public." Regional parks are of sufficient size to support outdoor recreation activities and are intended to serve the educational, cultural and recreation needs of the population of the entire region as well as visitors to HRM. As such, site amenities may include play structures, sport courts and fields, parking and pathways.

The expectation of HRM residents to have access to parks and recreational spaces year-round continues to grow, especially as weather patterns change resulting in more temperate weather through the winter months. Currently, most park spaces are accessible to residents throughout spring, summer and fall. While there are several parks with pathways cleared for winter activities, not all regional parks have snow clearing with designated priorities and council approved standards.

Both Parks and Road Operations employees are involved in the Transportation and Public Works (TPW) Winter Operations program that runs from the third Sunday in November to the first Friday the following April. As a result, approximately 80% of Parks staff transition to TPW during snow events. Once a snow event is complete, Parks staff transition back to complete regular Parks duties. The remaining 20% of Parks staff remain with Parks continually for greenhouse production, ice thickness testing and other snow clearing duties.

DISCUSSION

Throughout HRM, several regional park pathways and Active Transportation (AT) trails are winter maintained (Table 1). These areas are maintained by both TPW, as part of the Winter Operations program, and Parks where staffing and equipment resources allow. The pathways maintained by TPW are completed to the sidewalk clearing standards (Attachment 1), and those pathways cleared by Parks is through Parks Snow & Ice Removal Guidelines (Attachment 2).

Table 1 indicates both TPW Priority Standards (represented by P) and the Parks Guidelines (represented by G) in the priority standard column. TPW will service Regional Park pathways at a P1 level when those pathways exist along streets and sidewalks that are considered to be main arterials or where the Regional Park pathway is considered to be the main pedestrian transportation route for the area. TPW will service Regional Park pathways at a P2 level when those pathways exist in the vicinity of Halifax Transit routes and P3 when the Regional Park pathways are near residential streets and other walkways.

Parks staff will maintain pathways in regional parks at a G1 level where dedicated staff are in place and all others will be maintained at a G2 level. The Parks G3 guideline indicates that these pathways will be cleared only as resources allow. This G3 guideline is well suited to pilot new pathways.

Table 1 - Regional Parks -Status of Winter Maintenance

Regional Park	Description	Current Snow Removal (Y/N)	Service Provider	Priority Standard
Admiral Cove Park	Gravel/Natural pathway	N		
Bedford Barrens	Gravel/Natural pathway	N		
Woodside Area Park	Active Transportation (AT) trail	Y	TPW	P2
Sullivan's Pond Park	Asphalt pathway	Y	TPW	P2
Starr Park	Asphalt pathway	Y	TPW	P3
Shubie Park	Select AT trails cleared	Y	Parks	G1
Sandy Lake Park	Gravel Pathway	N		
Oakwood Park	Asphalt pathway	Y	TPW	P3
Lake Banook Regional Park	Active Transportation (AT) trail	Y	TPW	P1
Henry Findlay Park	From Hawthorne St to Nowlan St	Y	TPW	P2
First Lake Regional Park	Gravel pathway	N		
Dartmouth Common	Active Transportation (AT) trail & asphalt pathways	Y	TPW & Parks	P2
Cole Harbour Common	Asphalt pathway	Y	Parks	P2
Africville Park	Gravel pathway	N		
Chain of Lakes Trail	Active Transportation (AT) trail	Y	TPW	P1
Deadman's Island Park	Gravel pathway	N		
Fort Needham Memorial Park	Asphalt pathway	Y	TPW	P3
Halifax Central Common	Asphalt pathway	Y	TPW	P1
Halifax North Common	Asphalt pathway	Y	TPW	P1
Halifax West High School Park	Asphalt pathway	Y	TPW	P1
Linear Park	Active Transportation (AT) trail	Y	TPW	P2
Mainland Common	Asphalt pathway near ball diamond and dog park	Y	TPW	P1
Point Pleasant Park	Active Transportation (AT) trails, other select areas	Y	Parks	G1
Public Gardens	Main pathways	Y	Parks	G1
Sir Sandford Fleming Park	Asphalt pathway along seawall	N		

As outlined in Table 1, seven of the regional parks currently do not have any snow clearing of main pathways. Pursuant to Council's motion, staff have reviewed the advantages, disadvantages and costs to adding snow clearing to these remaining regional parks. As well, a summary of the recent environmental scan of parks snow clearing in comparative cities is also outlined below.

Advantages

Residents of HRM have made it clear that they need parks, trails and open spaces now more than ever. Not only does the community benefit from cleared parks pathways in the winter by increasing connectivity for residents and commuters throughout HRM, winter clearing in parks also leads to increased recreational opportunities, including walking, dog walking and winter sport activities that help contribute to a healthy and vibrant community. Keeping active in outdoor settings helps to replenish mental resiliency, battle

Depression, reduce anti-social behaviours and improve physical fitness. Particularly this year, the challenges caused by COVID-19 have highlighted parks spaces and year-round access as essential both for and beyond recreational needs.

Disadvantages

The challenges associated with additional snow clearing of regional park pathways include limited internal staffing, limited equipment, lack of connectivity to sidewalks and pathways which limits the efficiency at which the pathways can be cleared and lack of consistency of pathway width and materials which means that some require snow clearing by hand if they cannot accommodate snow clearing equipment.

There is a limited number of internal TPW and Parks staff to do the work required to clear additional regional parks pathways. As noted, currently 80% of all Parks staff transition to TPW Winter Works program, with only 20% remaining in Parks to provide necessary parks services. If more Parks staff were exempted from the Winter Operations program to focus on additional regional parks pathways, it would disadvantage the Winter Works program as there would be fewer staff to contribute to the clearing of streets, roads, sidewalks, ramps, push buttons, benches within the ROW, parking stations, bike racks and AT infrastructure, including bike lanes. Conversely, adding the regional park pathways to the TPW Winter Operations program would increase the inventory of sites to be cleared. For the past two years, Regional Council approved additional budget for TPW to hire seasonal employees to assist with increased accessibility with the additional staff focused on crosswalk ramps, bus stops, etc. This number would need to be further increased should the additional regional parks be included to the winter works program for snow clearing.

As well, there is limited equipment available to do the work internally. Parks currently has minimal snow clearing equipment which would be suitable to pathway clearing. However, with the purchase of snow clearing and salting attachments, existing Parks equipment could be used to clear asphalt pathways. The cost of the additional equipment is approximately \$10,000-20,000. Not only would this would eliminate the requirement to purchase additional fleet equipment, the size of the existing parks equipment would be better suited for the pathways in parks which tend to vary in size and condition.

Environmental Scan

In 2019, consultant KPMG conducted a review of TPW Winter Operations Service Standards and indicated comparator cities such as Ottawa, Quebec City and Hamilton only service select paved multi-use pathways, walkways and trails. In Guelph, 25km of recreational trails are maintained. The City of Winnipeg has designated some park pathways to be cleared and those pathways are determined by the Public Works Department as funding is available within the approved budget. Maintenance standards and guidelines of 1 to 5 days in comparative cities are consistent with HRM's TPW standards and the Parks guidelines. (Attachments 1 and 2). Similar to HRM, KPMG found that regional parks pathways are not all consistent in width or material, and in most cities, walkways and multi-use pathways are generally cleared if they are 1.6 meters or more and paved with asphalt or concrete.

Parks Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines

The Parks Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines are long standing guidelines originally implemented for Point Pleasant Park and Shubie Park. Over the years, as snow clearing has been expanded to additional pathways in regional parks, these standards have been used. The difference in the parks standards versus the TPW sidewalk clearing standards is a result of the fact that the majority of the parks staff transfer to TPW for winter works program. Therefore, the service levels outlined in the Parks Snow & Ice Removal Guidelines are those which can be successfully achieved with the park's resources which are available through the winter season.

With the addition of more regional park pathways for snow clearing, the guidelines should be formally adopted for all regional parks to ensure consistent application across all parks. Therefore, it is recommended that the Parks Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines be adopted for all regional parks. The approval of additional sites and consistent guidelines for all of the regional parks being cleared will provide

an opportunity to determine whether the guidelines are appropriate, and the resourcing required to meet those guidelines. Regional Council has recently approved winter standards for sidewalks with direction to staff to review those standards after a 5-year period for any necessary adjustments. It is recommended that a similar review of the Parks Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines be under taken and the two reviews be aligned to be able to determine any efficiencies and improved consistencies.

Recommended Service Adjustments

As noted in Table 1, of the pathways in regional parks that are not provided winter snow clearing, all are gravel, with the exception of the seawall pathway in Sir Sanford Fleming Park.

The seawall pathway in Sir Sandford Fleming Park could be added to the regional park areas in 2021/22. This pathway is of an adequate width for equipment with asphalt surfacing. If Regional Council approved the addition of this park, staff would start clearing it for the remainder of this winter season with existing resources at a priority level 3 as indicated in the Parks Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines. However, going forward, the addition of this site as well as the other recommended locations once they are paved, would require the purchase of the snow attachments to supplement existing Parks equipment and the additional staff exemptions from the Winter Works Program starting with one in the 2022/23 winter season and the second once the additional parks are added. With those additions, in future years, the additional pathways would be able to be cleared based on the priority standards noted above.

The remaining regional parks currently not receiving winter maintenance all have gravel pathways. Currently both the crusher dust pathways in the Public Gardens and Point Pleasant Park gravel roadways are cleared during the winter using Parks staff dedicated to those sites and exempt from the TPW Winter Operations program. In addition to the snow clearing, these areas require the application of sand/salt for traction. Each spring repair of the pathways is also required.

Of the remaining regional parks, Admiral Cove Park, Bedford Barrens and Deadman's Island Park pathways are not recommended for winter maintenance due to the narrow width and steep incline of the pathways. Based on the configuration of the pathways, the ability to clear and maintain them in a manner to enable safe passage for pedestrians would be very difficult. Therefore, they are not recommended for clearing so as to not encourage usage on potential unsafe pathways.

Pathways in Sandy Lake Park, First Lake Regional Park and Africville Park are currently gravel pathways, approximately 2m wide and could be winter maintained if the pathways were converted to asphalt. Therefore, it is recommended that funding be considered during the 2022/23 capital budget process for these sites. Once these main pathways are converted to asphalt, it is expected that they could be added to the inventory for clearing with minimal additional costs due to the addition of equipment and staff as noted above.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are minimal financial implications associated with this report, as the equipment costs (\$10,000 - \$20,000) could be absorbed by the Parks Operations budget (W705). The TPW operating budget would be impacted by the additional Parks staff exemption, requiring replacement seasonal staff estimated at \$50,000, which would be brought forward for consideration in the 2022/23 operating budget.

If it is determined that main pathways in Sandy Lake Park, First Lake Regional Park and Africville Park are to be winter maintained, it is recommended that the surfaces are converted to asphalt. Preliminary estimates to convert approximately 5km of gravel pathways to asphalt to be able to provide winter service is approximately \$1.1million, but this number will be refined for consideration in the 2022/23 capital budget deliberations

RISK CONSIDERATION

The risks associated with this recommendation rate low. Based on previous history of adding winter maintenance to additional park assets, there has been minimal risk as it provides for safer usage of pathways for residents.

There is risk to adding pathways which are not able to be safely cleared. Clearing those pathways would encourage increased usage and may result in injuries. The recommendation in this report mitigate that risk by not proposing those pathways receive winter maintenance.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement has been conducted for this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications associated with the recommendation in this report.

ALTERNATIVES

The Transportation Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council direct the CAO to:

1. Not include add Sir Sandford Fleming Park Seawall pathway to the regional pathways for winter maintenance.
2. Not approve the Park Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines for all regional park pathways receiving winter maintenance. This would result in inconsistencies in the maintenance of pathways in regional parks.
3. Not include consideration of paving of any or all of the recommended regional parks in the 2022/23 capital budget deliberations. This would result in the locations not able to be added to the list of regional parks receiving winter maintenance.
4. Undertake a review of the park pathways and guidelines on a different timeline than the TPW review. This could reduce the opportunity for efficiencies and improved consistency.
5. Include pathways in other regional parks to the list of locations receiving winter maintenance. This would require additional analysis on the costs and feasibility of the locations and a subsequent report to council.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - TPW Sidewalk Clearing Standards

Attachment 2 - Parks Snow and Ice Removal Guidelines

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Alana Tapper, Superintendent Parks West, 902.490.6534

Attachment 1 - TPW Sidewalk Clearing Standards

Sidewalk Classification	When clearing begins	Timeline to completion after end of event	Finish Surface Condition
1. Downtown Halifax & Dartmouth (Priority 1)	After 5cm	12 hours	Bare (or as close to bare as possible given conditions)
2. Main Arterials (Priority 1)	After 15cm	12 hours	Bare or with salt / sand for traction
3. Halifax Transit Routes (Priority 2)	After 15cm	18 hours	Bare or with salt / sand for traction
4. School drop off zones (Priority 2)	After 15cm	18 hours	Bare or with salt / sand for traction
5. Residential Streets and Walkways not on Transit Routes (Priority 3)	After 15cm	36 hours	Bare or with salt / sand for traction
6. Intersections/ bus stops	After end of snowfall	48 Hours	Bare or with salt / sand for traction

Attachment 2

Parks Snow & Ice Removal Guidelines

Priority	Description
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cleared of snow within 48 hours of snow event stop time• If sanding or salting is required, it will be completed within 72 hours of snow event stop time
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cleared of snow within 96 hours of snow event stop time.• If sanding or salting is required, it will be completed within 120 hours of snow event stop time
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cleared of snow only as resources and time allows• If sanding and salting is required, it will be completed as resources and time allows

Other mitigating factors with the Parks snow and ice removal guidelines include:

- Snow removal activities may not be needed for events with 5cm or less of accumulation.
- Accumulation of 25cm or more negates the expectation that areas will be cleared within the specified time.
- The push back or removal of site line obstructions within Parks caused by snow clearing activities will be completed as time and resources allow.