HARBORD VILLAGE
RESIDENTS'
ASSOCIATION
Box 68522, 360A Bloor St. W.
Toronto, ON M5S 1X1

Delivered only by Email to: mayor_tory@toronto.ca

November 20, 2020

His Worship John Tory
Mayor, City of Toronto
100 Queen Street West
City Hall, Second Floor West
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Re: Clearing the Path Towards a Safe and Accessible Winter IE17.1

Dear Mayor Tory:

Harbord Village, bounded by Bloor, Bathurst, College and Spadina, is in the downtown snow clearing exclusion zone. **Mayor Tory, we need your help! We need a champion to break the logjam and petty bickering that has raised age-old city/suburban divisions that have blocked action to harmonize sidewalk snow clearing across the City.** We wrote to you on this matter in January 2018 (attached). And we were pleased when you wrote Transportation Services in February 2019 (attached) requesting a cost and benefit review of harmonizing sidewalk snow clearing.

Sadly the Winter Maintenance Program Review (IE8.6 October 2019) from Transportation Services was silent on the benefits of harmonization. It was relegated to a pilot even smaller than recommended by the consultants. More delay on harmonization resulted, but ironically, service improvements were recommended for those sidewalks already being cleared. And most recently, at the November 5, 2020 Infrastructure and Environment Committee, a tie vote defeated a motion (Matlow/Layton IE17.7) to prepare a plan for harmonization. Even preparing a plan couldn't overcome old divisions. Lastly, Ms. Gray of Transportation Services reported that the pilot is being extended into this winter with a report in spring 2021. Ms. Gray was unclear where authority to extend the pilot and delay the report was sourced. Your February 2019 request, 22 months ago, for the costs and benefits of harmonization remains outstanding.

We have written and deputed at various Committees over the years, and offered to help with the pilot; we even offered a guided walk-about for Transportation Services in our neighbourhood last year. But Committees bickered, delayed and offered a litany of excuses easily debunked (attached). And the silence from Transportation Services makes it clear that it had little interest in engaging our downtown neighbourhood. With streets and vehicles so dominating the work of Transportation Services, we honestly are concerned about their ability to be even-handed with pedestrian policy matters. Their resistance to our input and any material role from the Toronto Accessibility Committee feeds that concern.

With respect, we are exhausted by disingenuous delays to "study" the matter when all know the issue: The immense savings in City liability costs, the reduction in human suffering from slips and falls, and the freedom from being housebound for seniors, persons with disabilities, and even parents with young children needing strollers. And if there were any doubt, a section of East York with City sidewalk clearing has little to distinguish itself from other downtown neighbourhoods. The issue is well known. To "study" at this stage is simply to delay, and deny a basic service while reaping the savings from that denial. This is indefensible!

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Let us also not forget that harmonization also ends (arguably) the human rights violations suffered by groups protected under the Act. This alone is reason for action, action long overdue, action now.

In a pandemic, our 5-foot wide sidewalks were far from helpful for social distancing in good weather. Now imagine trying to walk single-file following footsteps in our snow covered residential sidewalks, if you can risk it, to just get around or for exercise through this COVID-19 winter. Absent action now, that's what we face.

We remain resolved to have this discriminatory treatment of downtown neighbourhoods ended now. And while we always prefer to resolve issues in partnership with our elected city representatives and city staff, should delay and obfuscation continue, we will be forced to seek other approaches.

Mr. Mayor, please help bridge those old divisions and champion the harmonization of snow clearing across the City now!

Yours truly,

Anne Fleming
Chair, HRVA
chair@harbordvillage.com

cc: City Councillors – only by email

Attachments:
Debunking Excuses for Inaction
HVRA Letter to the Mayor Tory January 2018
Mayor Tory's Letter to Transportation Services February 2019

Debunking Excuses for Inaction on
Harmonization of Sidewalk Snow Clearing in Toronto

Allegation: Parked cars are in the way.
Facts: Cars only park on one side of residential streets; one side is always wide open. And when the snow flies, cars cannot even park near the curb because of mounds of snow. **Allegation false!**

Allegation: Residential sidewalks are too narrow.
Facts: Equipment currently used on nearby main streets is 4 feet wide; our neighbourhood sidewalks are 5 feet. **Allegation false!**

Note: Our sidewalks are too narrow to social distance in good weather. Now image trying to walk single-file following footsteps in our snow covered residential sidewalks, if you can risk it, to get around or for exercise through this COVID-19 winter.

Allegation: The City already clears downtown residential sidewalks for seniors and persons with disabilities.
Facts: This City program only clears the frontage of those residences; those same seniors and persons with disabilities are left to risk life and limb to get further than the property line. **Allegation false!**

Allegation: There are too many obstacles on downtown residential sidewalks.
Facts: There are few obstacles on residential sidewalks. Many more are on nearby main streets that are already cleared. **Allegation false!**

Allegation: There were only 3,000 complaints last year and only 44 fines issued for residents not clearing the sidewalk under the bylaw; the system is working.
Facts: Downtowners know complaining is useless. The standard reply is that a complaint will be "investigated within 3 weeks." **Allegation false!**

Allegation: Downtown neighbourhoods have it pretty good and not having snow clearing is just part of downtown life. This was actually argued by a Councillor at the Infrastructure and Environment Committee this month.
Facts: There is one mill rate for city residential taxes; basic City services should apply to everyone. **Allegation false!**

Allegation: We can't afford it.
Facts: Funds are always found to clear new bike lanes. Last year funds were found to improve service levels where sidewalks are already cleared. What we can't afford to pay is about $7 million a year in liability costs for winter slips and falls along with the related human suffering. Save those millions, reduce the suffering, and clear the snow. **Allegation false!**

Note: In the biggest and most prosperous municipality in the country, it's not credible to say that we can't afford to clear the snow from all our sidewalks. Making service improvement for the sidewalks already cleared and expanding snow clearing for new bike lanes (both needed) is evidence that funds are available.

In any case, we should get good value for money. Clearing the most used sidewalks - downtown residential sidewalks, is undoubtedly very good value for money.

HRVA November 19, 2020

HARBORD VILLAGE
RESIDENTS'
ASSOCIATION
Box 68522, 360A Bloor St. W.
Toronto, ON M5S 1X1

January 24, 2018

His Worship John Tory
Mayor, City of Toronto
100 Queen St. West
City Hall, Second floor, West
Toronto, ON, M5H 2N2

Councillor Joe Cressy
Trinity-Spadina
100 Queen Street West
City Hall, Suite C50
Toronto, ON, M5H 2N2

Dear Sirs:

I am writing on behalf of the Harbord Village Residents' Association. Within our neighbourhood or just next door we are blessed with:

- three primary schools;
- two secondary schools;
- a university and a college;
- almost a dozen places of worship;
- a plethora of local shops, restaurants, and professional/medical offices;
- many music, arts and theatre venues/facilities;
- Kensington Market; and
- a major long-term care facility.

All this, combined with public transit on all bordering arterial roads and on our local high street, means we are walkers.

We walk to school, to work, to play, to worship, to shop, to eat, to entertainment, to transit, and much much more! We travel in the very modes the City is making great efforts to incent others to replicate.

Are we living the dream? Not so much in the winter! Isn't it ironic that the most used (and loved) sidewalks are the least cared for by the City; i.e. the City does not clear snow from our residential sidewalks. Yet, in the "serviced area," reliant on cars, there are long stretches of little used sidewalks that are cleared by the City.

The absence of City snow removal from our residential sidewalks is a perpetual complaint at our annual general meetings and throughout the winter. In reply, we have dutifully explained the responsibility of property owners to clear their sidewalks, the City program to assist seniors, and how to complain if sidewalks are not cleared.

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It is not just that snow is perpetually not cleared from some segments of our residential sidewalks by those responsible under the bylaw, or that the City enables such conduct by not enforcing its bylaws, there are real consequences that we endure:

- we risk *life and limb* traversing snow and ice covered residential sidewalks;
- some take other risks and opt to walk on the road… as it is often passable when the sidewalk is not;
- some sadly just retreat and return home, or remain housebound knowing the risk is too great, thus the *walkable* neighbourhood turns homes into prisons for some elderly and those with mobility challenges; and
- we do not get what we pay for. It is not lost on us that the unserviced area produces a financial windfall for the City – charging for a service that is not delivered.

For these reasons, the HVRA Board unanimously passed the following resolution at its January meeting:

> "**Let it be resolved that the HVRA calls on our Councillor, the Mayor, and City Council to provide an equal level of snow removal services for all sidewalks within the City's borders**."

Not all is grim with regards to snow removal. We are among the neighbourhoods that have welcomed a new segregated bike lane. We applaud the City for the robust way that it clears snow from the growing network of segregated bike lanes. This took care, attention and equipment, as does the snow-clearing program for seniors on residential sidewalks. These successes prove that residential sidewalks in the "unserviced area" can be cleared, and equity demands that they should be cleared. Where there is a will, there is a way!

We look forward to your support in bringing City snow removal services to all residential sidewalks in Toronto.

Yours truly,

Robert Stambula
Board Member

cc: Gail Misra, Chair

John Tory
Mayor

February 5, 2019

Barbara Gray
General Manager, Transportation Services
City of Toronto
Toronto City Hall 24th fl. E.,
100 Queen St. W. Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Dear Ms. Gray,

Last week, the City of Toronto experienced one of the largest snow storms of the last 10 years. Given the huge amount of snow and the bone-chilling temperatures, I appreciate the work that crews performed quickly to clean-up our main streets and make sure our city kept moving.

But despite these Herculean efforts by our crews to respond to the storm in a timely manner, I know many residents felt frustrated with the service they received.

Our City's winter operations are some of the most important services that we provide to our residents. They ensure that despite the most severe weather conditions of the year, our residents can get around Toronto to work, school, and appointments, in a safe and timely manner.

I believe our residents expect this service to be reliable and absolutely there when they need it throughout the winter season.

During and after last week's storm, my office alone had more than 150 calls and emails from residents who were dissatisfied with the City's snow removal service. Many of the complaints focused on sidewalk and windrow clearing. We also know many TTC streetcars were stopped by cars parked illegally blocking the vehicle tracks – these foolish and inconsiderate decisions by individual drivers delayed hundreds of riders and is simply unacceptable. I know Councillors similarly received a higher than normal volume of complaints.

I want to make sure we are providing the absolute best winter operations we can, recognizing that last week's storm was one of the worst in a decade.

Notwithstanding that fact, and especially in light of changing weather patterns, it is our job to be as ready as we can be for any event

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Accordingly, to ensure that we are doing everything possible to deal with difficult and extreme winter weather, I believe it is time for a review of our winter operations. I would request that the review include:

- A study of our service levels around snow removal and whether they should be increased.
- The threshold for declaring a major snow event to trigger parking restrictions along key routes so those routes can be cleared quicker and more thoroughly.
- How we can establish a zero tolerance system for vehicles blocking streetcar routes to ensure they are removed immediately and that drivers face stiff penalties for this infraction.
- A look at best practices and technology used in other Canadian cities when dealing with snow and ice.
- The cost of clearing the sidewalks in the Toronto and East York community council area and a detailed look at the benefits of harmonizing the city's sidewalk clearing.

I believe this review is timely and important given the increasing unpredictability of our winter weather.

I look forward to seeing the results of this review in the near future.

Sincerely,

John Tory

Copy:

Councillor James Pasternak, Chair of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee
Councillor Jaye Robinson, Chair of the Toronto Transit Commission