

SAULT STE. MARIE

# THE SAULT STAR



## Heavy snow, ice removal from driveways could cost taxpayers more

*City councillors raise concerns about who would be serviced under a windrow removal program and how much it would cost.*

[Elaine Della-Mattia](#)

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Heavy snow and ice left at the bottom of driveways can be hard on homeowners.

Public works staff have been asked to explore options and programs that would help homeowners rid of heavy ice and snow left at the end of driveways from snowplows.

The resolution, moved by Ward 5 Coun. Corey Gardi passed with a 6-4 vote but not before some councillors voiced their concerns that the issue have been explored before and the costs of proceeding with any such action could be a hindrance on the city's budget.

Gardi's resolution asks staff to report back on the costs of developing a program that would allow those 65 years of age and older, and people with physical disabilities and/or medical conditions, opt in to a program, at a nominal cost, that would assist with clearing the heavier snow windrows from driveways.

The plan must also set out the parameters or the amount of snowfall that would have to fall, over a specific period of time, and what type of thawing/snow clearing and other factors would trigger the clearing of windrows.

"This needs to be done sooner rather than later," Gardi told city council.

Aging demographics and helping seniors and others remain in their home is paramount and the challenges of some snowfalls Sault Ste. Marie experiences, along with the melting and freezing periods in between, can be difficult for some.

He wants to see a program in place before next winter.

But several councillors said the administration of such a program, and determining who would qualify and who wouldn't, as well as collecting any nominal fees, would be a logistical nightmare for public works staff.

"I struggle with the practicality of it," said Ward 1 Coun. Paul Christian. "I don't want to prejudice staff but I'm fearful that this will be too hard to maintain," he said, resulting in additional workload for staff.

"This could be a slippery slope," he added.

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker called the motion far too restrictive.

"I don't believe this report will get us there because it's too specific. It should just ask staff for several options," he said.

Ward 4 Coun. Marchy Bruni questioned whether the city should be charging taxpayers for the snow removal service. He also raised concerns about potential issues if damage was done to the ends of driveways from city equipment and how the work would be completed with existing manpower.

Several years ago the costs of providing windrow service was explored and the report to council said an additional \$343,000 to \$1 million would be needed in the budget to cover those operations.

A program once led by Red Cross that assisted eligible homeowners with snow removal and light housekeeping duties has ended, which means city council cannot choose to help support that program.

Ward 2 Coun. Luke Dufour also reminded city council that council reduced the winter control budget a year ago and adding this service for taxpayers would not only mean reversing the last budget reduction but adding much more money to it.

“I acknowledge windrows are a barrier to some and inconvenient but the city offers a good level of winter control service, and more than other communities,” he said.

Ward 3 Coun. Donna Hilsinger encouraged city council to look at the motion as an opportunity to better serve residents of the community and make a winter community a place where more people want to live.

Ward 5 Coun. Matthew Scott said he’s spoken to public works employees who say they’re just getting by with the tasks they have on hand now.

“I don’t support this now. I think we need something more fiscally sound,” he said.

Mayor Christian Provenzano chimed in noting the motion only asks for a report at this time and city staff have the expertise to examine different options and council will have the opportunity to review those options and decide what it wants to do at that time.

He noted that any options that cost more money would need to be added to the levy, costing taxpayers more money.

“We need to be cognizant of that,” he said.