

Cold comfort in snow survey

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The majority of Calgarians are satisfied with the city's current snow-removal policy and a shift to a bare-pavement rule is nowhere in the horizon because it will multiply the cost by five, says city administration.

In a survey conducted by the Calgary roads department, 82% of 800 polled said they agree with city's policy that sets priorities for sanding and clearing streets in the downtown core and heavily travelled routes, such as Memorial Dr., Macleod Tr., Crowchild Tr. and others.

They also agreed that residential streets be given the lowest priority.

To shift the policy to a bare-pavement rule means the city's currently approved \$22.2 million for 2009 would balloon to about \$100 million.

Ryan Jestin, director of roads, said the survey was done in June and "the public quite simply told us they're in favour" of the policy.

"The citizens have said that they are not interested in paying any more money beyond what we've recommended today in the report," said Jestin.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart questions why the survey was done in June when the problem wasn't visible.

"I think it's easy for people to be satisfied when they're polled about snowing when it's 30C outside," said Colley-Urquhart.

"The reality is in the winter, people get very, very frustrated when they can't get out to work."

But Colley-Urquhart said polling the people in winter is not necessarily an answer to find exactly what people want.

"It's a bigger issue than that. What we really need to have is a discussion with Calgarians with what they want to cut in order to balance the books," she said. "I absolutely support zero tax increase but we need to ask what services are we going to cut, is it snow removal, cutting protective services, LRT?"

Jestin said historically speaking, Calgary has never had a bare-pavement policy because of the city's topography and the weather.

"Is Chinook part of the policy? No it's not. But it's the reality of the type of weather that we get here in Calgary," said Jestin.

Ald. Bob Hawkesworth said there's no appetite for those kind of budgetary increases to see massive snow-removal improvements.

"I just don't see that citizens would want it, nor is it necessary," said Hawkesworth, whose constituents inundated the city with snow-removal complaints calls last winter.

Hawkesworth pointed out that the administration has found three areas -- equipment, materials and overtime -- where they can cut costs, although the report didn't indicate how much.

"I'm confident that the money that had been freed up will be re-invested to ensure that there's a better level of service," he said.

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