

Snow-Clearing Bylaw Enforcement in Hamilton (2018–2026): Trends, Enforcement Actions, and Key Findings

Overview

The enforcement of the Snow Removal By-law in Hamilton from 2018 through early 2026 is characterized by a consistently high volume of winter complaints. Each winter season, hundreds to thousands of complaints are received, resulting in orders to comply, fines, and, in some cases, the City hiring contractors to clear properties at the owners' expense. While warnings were issued, enforcement was lacking.

Year-by-Year Enforcement Data

There is very limited and inconsistent information regarding the exact, year-by-year charges laid for failing to clear sidewalks in Hamilton between 2021 and 2026. Enforcement is primarily reactive and often relies on warnings while very few result in charges. However, specific figures from recent seasons illustrate the scope of municipal action:

Jan 1 – March 15, 2019: This was a record snowfall year with 161 cm. The city received 2,786 complaints, issued 1,240 orders to comply, and sent 77 properties to contractors for clearing. Reports indicate that 62 fines were issued to property owners.

January 2022: A major storm resulted in 285 complaints and, 14 orders to comply and 2 charged inspection fees. No information on violations recorded.

2026 Season: As of early February 2026, more than 280 complaints were received. There is no data for non-compliance or charges.

Contractor Clearing and Property Tax Charges

The exact cumulative number of property owners who had snow-clearing costs added to their property tax bills from 2020 to 2025 is not available.

Key Findings on Enforcement Practices

Complaint-Driven: The city operates a reactive, complaint-based model of enforcement, particularly for residential areas. Municipal law enforcement responds to complaints rather than proactively clearing all sidewalks.

"Rarely Happens": Although the bylaw empowers the city to clear snow and charge costs to property tax bills, there is insufficient information compared to the total number of complaints.

Service Level Enhancement: During the 2021/2022 winter, the City of Hamilton expanded its sidewalk snow-clearing program, reducing the reliance on private property owners for clearing major routes.

Conclusion

Although hundreds of complaints are made annually regarding uncleared sidewalks in Hamilton, the city relies on a complaint basis which results in some compliance with little enforcement.