



City of Hamilton

Citizen Committee Report

To: Chair and Members
Emergency & Community Services Committee

From: Penelope Petrie, Chair, Seniors Advisory Committee

Date: May 7, 2026

Report No: **CCR SAC 26-001**

Subject/Title: Improved Enforcement of Snow Removal By-law to Assist Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

Recommendations

WHEREAS, the City of Hamilton's mission is "to provide high quality, cost-conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner." Ensuring safe and accessible sidewalks during winter months aligns with this mission, particularly for seniors and individuals with disabilities;

WHEREAS, research conducted by David Broom (summary attached hereto as Appendix A), the City of Hamilton is home to 104,290 seniors aged 65 and older and approximately 155,850 people aged 15 and over identify as living with disabilities;

WHEREAS, currently, snow removal on City sidewalks is inconsistent. Some areas are well-maintained, while others are neglected, creating significant challenges and safety concerns for seniors and persons with disabilities;

WHEREAS, the City of Hamilton’s Snow Removal By-law 03-296 requires that “every occupant or owner shall, within 24 hours of the cessation of a Winter Storm Event, or within 24 hours of the cessation of a series of Consecutive winter storm events, remove and clear all snow and ice from sidewalks abutting the highways in front of, or along side, or at the rear of any occupied or unoccupied lot, or vacant lot”;

WHEREAS, seniors and persons with disabilities depend on clear pathways for safe mobility, and inconsistent snow removal undermines their safety and independence, which may lead to psychological and physical isolation;

WHEREAS, research conducted by David Broom (attached hereto as Appendix B), indicates that enforcement of the Snow Removal By-law in Hamilton from 2018 through early 2026 is characterized by a consistently high volume of winter complaints;

WHEREAS, expansion of City-led sidewalk clearing during the 2021–2022 winter reduced reliance on private property owners for major routes;

WHEREAS, the 2026 municipal budget has already been adopted, so requesting additional funding for comprehensive sidewalk snow clearing is not feasible;

WHEREAS, the City of Hamilton by-law enforcement officers rely solely on complaints against properties where snow removal has clearly not occurred to enforce Snow Removal By-law;

WHEREAS, a more proactive approach to enforcement of the Snow Removal By-law would ensure that sidewalks are cleared after major snowfall events, particularly in high-traffic corridors, areas with recurring complaints, and locations serving vulnerable populations that have not been cleared in accordance with the By-law;

WHEREAS, when the Snow Removal By-law is enforced, the responsible property owner or occupant can be fined, a work crew can be dispatched to clear the snow, and all associated costs of snow removal can be applied to the property tax role;

WHEREAS, the City offers a \$450 Snow Clearing Subsidy for low-income seniors and residents with disabilities to hire help with snow removal, but demand after storms makes meeting the 24-hour by-law requirement difficult;

WHEREAS, the City effectively clears roadways, but large mounds of snow are often left at intersections and crosswalks. These accumulations hinder seniors and persons with disabilities, who may have to use the road to find a cleared driveway, increasing their risk; and

WHEREAS, significant gaps exist in year-by-year data on complaints, inspections, fines, and contractor recoveries. Publishing annual summary statistics would improve transparency, support evidence-based policy decisions, and allow residents and Council to better assess enforcement effectiveness.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Seniors Advisory Committee requests that Council direct staff to conduct a feasibility study for report back to the Planning Committee by July 31, 2026, with recommendations on improving enforcement of the Snow Removal By-law respecting sidewalks, with consideration of the following:
 - (i) implementation of a program of active, continuous monitoring and prompt removal of snow at crosswalks and intersections, ensuring safe passage for all residents;
 - (ii) proactive inspection and assessment of sidewalks by by-law enforcement officers following a major snowfall event, particularly in high traffic corridors, areas with recurring complaints, and locations serving vulnerable populations that have not been cleared in compliance with the Snow Removal By-law, resulting in immediate fines being laid and work crews being dispatched to clear the snow at the owner's expense;
 - (iii) further expansion of City-led sidewalk clearing, particularly in areas with high pedestrian volumes, seniors, or accessibility needs;

- (iv) increased public education efforts through seasonal reminders, clear online guidance, and targeted communications during major snow events;
- (v) implementation of a registry program for participants in the City's Snow Clearing Subsidy Program, accessible to by-law enforcement officers;
- (vi) exemption for residents who are eligible for the Snow Clearing Subsidy through extension of the 24-hour compliance period to 72 hours;
- (vii) implementation of a centralized tracking system that records enforcement outcomes from complaint to resolution;
- (viii) provision of real-time updates on complaint status, enforcement actions taken, or reasons for delays, to enhance transparency and reinforce public confidence in the by-law enforcement process; and
- (ix) publication of annual summary statistics to improve transparency, support evidence-based policy decisions, and allow residents and Council to better assess enforcement effectiveness.

Background

The Seniors Advisory Committee (SAC) acts as a credible communication vehicle on issues affecting the quality of life of seniors in the City of Hamilton, providing a forum to identify concerns, explore solutions, and support implementation of improvements.

This recommendation aligns directly with SAC's mandate by addressing winter sidewalk accessibility, a significant and ongoing quality-of-life and safety issue for seniors and persons with disabilities. Through research and analysis, the Committee has identified potential inconsistencies in snow removal and enforcement that limit mobility, independence, and community participation.

Analysis/Rationale

Safe and accessible sidewalks are critical to the mobility, independence, and well-being of seniors and persons with disabilities. Winter conditions magnify existing barriers, particularly when snow and ice remain uncleared for extended periods.

Hamilton has a rapidly aging population, and a prevalence of mobility-related disabilities. While the City has made notable investments in roadway maintenance and has expanded City-led sidewalk clearing on select routes, many sidewalks remain the responsibility of individual property owners, resulting in inconsistent outcomes.

The Snow Removal By-law provides a strong regulatory framework; however, the complaint-based enforcement model limits its effectiveness. Complaint volumes remain high each winter, and the same locations often recur as problem areas. At the same time, many seniors and residents with disabilities are reluctant or unable to file complaints, leaving non-compliance unaddressed.

The Seniors Advisory Committee recognizes the fiscal constraints facing the City and does not propose immediate, large-scale service expansion requiring new operating funding. Instead, this report emphasizes practical, data-driven, and equity-focused improvements to enforcement and coordination within existing resources.

Proactive inspections following major storm events would shift enforcement from reactive to preventative, reducing the duration and severity of accessibility barriers. Targeting known problem locations and high-use corridors maximizes impact while minimizing cost. Improved tracking and reporting would allow Council and residents to evaluate outcomes and identify trends, supporting continuous improvement.

Additional measures—such as better integration of the Snow Clearing Subsidy Program into enforcement practices, clear public communication, and limited compliance flexibility for registered vulnerable residents—acknowledge the realities faced by seniors and people with disabilities while maintaining by-law integrity.

The July 31, 2026, report-back deadline was selected to ensure that any recommended improvements to the enforcement of the Snow Removal By-law can proceed through Council and administrative approvals in time to inform planning and operational readiness for the 2026–2027 winter season. The timeline also considers potential disruptions to Council meeting schedules associated with the 2026 municipal election. To support a comprehensive and practical feasibility assessment, the recommendation requests collaboration between Planning and Economic Development - Municipal Law Enforcement staff, Public Works staff and Healthy & Safe Communities staff, recognizing that effective snow removal enforcement requires coordination across departments responsible for by-law administration, sidewalk operations, and winter maintenance.

Collectively, these actions would significantly enhance winter sidewalk accessibility, reduce injury risk, and support Hamilton’s commitments to age-friendly planning, accessibility, and inclusion.

Appendices Attached

Appendix A: Demographic Profile of Seniors and People with Disabilities in Hamilton

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