Report - Standing Policy Committee on Public Works - July 8, 2003

Minute No. 304
Item No. 6 Boulevard Maintenance (By-law No. 5895/92)
File PB-1

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee received the matter as information with a recommendation to Council that the matter be filed.

For the information of Council, the request to restore Regional Street Boulevard Maintenance to 1988 services levels will be considered during deliberations on the Current Estimates.

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Angus,

That the matter be received as information with a recommendation to Council that the matter be filed; and

That Council be advised that the request to restore Regional Street Boulevard Maintenance to 1988 services levels will be considered during deliberations on the Current Estimates.

Carried

STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION:

On July 8, 2003, the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works concurred in the administrative recommendation and requested the Directors of Planning, Property and Development and Public Works Departments, in consultation with the Mynarski Ward Councillor, undertake a review of the Vacant Buildings By-law and the enforcement of the Noxious Weed Act.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 8, 2003, the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works submitted the following to Council, namely:

1. That Regional Street Boulevard Maintenance be restored to 1988 service levels, and that boulevards adjacent to city owed lots and private resident areas that have not been kept up to reasonable standards, be addressed by the Department of Public Works.
2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing, including the execution of any documents related thereto.

Further, the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works requested the Administration to report back to the meeting of the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works scheduled for September 9, 2003 outlining costs, additional resources required and timelines on the following, namely:

1. Restoration of park mowing to 14 cycles,

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

2. Restoration of all flowerbeds and shrub maintenance,
3. Restoration of Ash forests,
4. Restoration of bark benches, and the removal of graffiti from park buildings,
5. Restoration of floral displays to 1988 service levels.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On June 25, 2003, Council ruled automatic referral of the following motion to the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works

Moved by Councillor Lazarenko,
Seconded by Councillor Wyatt,

WHEREAS under the Boulevard Maintenance By-law No. 5895/92, the City of Winnipeg holds property owners and occupants responsible for the care and maintenance of certain adjacent boulevards across the City and, if property owners and occupants fail in their responsibility, the City may maintain and care for the boulevard and apply the cost to the property tax;

AND WHEREAS City inspectors issue notices to the owners and occupants of private property under the Noxious Weed Act and, if the owner or occupant does not cut or take other remedial action within a period of time, the City has the authority to enter, cut or take remedial action and to apply the cost to the property tax;

AND WHEREAS as an owner of property itself, whether obtained through purchase or tax sale, serving operational or parks purposes, the City is responsible for the care and maintenance of its properties and for many boulevards;

AND WHEREAS the City has neglected the care and maintenance of many properties and boulevards under its responsibility, to the detriment of neighbourhoods;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that City Council immediately ensure that all City-owned lots, grounds and parks and all boulevards for which the City is responsible are cut, cared for and maintained to acceptable standards;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that City Council immediately ensure the enforcement of the Boulevard Maintenance By-law and the Noxious Weed Act in order to clean up overgrown properties and boulevards for which others are responsible.

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On June 10, 2003, the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works referred the matter to the Administration to undertake a review of present boulevard maintenance practices and report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works.

Re: **Boulevard Maintenance Practices**

For Submission To: Standing Policy Committee on Public Works

Submitted By: J.A. Thomson, P. Eng., Director of Public Works

Report Date: June 23, 2003

Recommendation(s):

That this report be received as information.

Report Summary

KEY ISSUES:

1. Over the last 15 years, funding for boulevard maintenance has been reduced by 30% for mowing (14 to 10 cycles), 54% for herbiciding, 50% for boulevard spring cleanup, 90% for boulevard repair and restoration and 95% for irrigation.

2. Under the current level of funding and maintenance, boulevards will gradually continue to deteriorate and become weedier.

3. Public weed complaints have gradually risen from 2,600 in 1988 to 3,800 in 2002.

4. According to a survey conducted in December of 2001, 47% of the public were satisfied with weed control in parks and on boulevards, 30% were neutral and 23% were unsatisfied.

5. According to a survey conducted in the fall of 2002, 56% were satisfied with boulevard maintenance, 24% were neutral and 20% were unsatisfied.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION(S):

General Implications

[X] None
[ ] For the organization overall and/or for other departments
[ ] For the community and/or organizations external to the City of Winnipeg
[ ] Involves a multi-year contract

Comments:

Policy Implications:

[X] No
[ ] Yes

Comments:

Environmental Implications:

[X] No
[ ] Yes

Comments:

Human Resource Implications:

[X] No
[ ] Yes

Comments:

Financial Implications:

[X] Within approved current and/or capital budget
[ ] Current and/or capital budget adjustment needed

Comment:

REPORT

REASON FOR THE REPORT:

On June 10th, 2003 the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works directed that the Parks and Open Space Division of the Public Works Department prepare a report on current boulevard maintenance practices.

HISTORY:

Budget reductions in the early 80's lowered boulevard mowing from 17 to 14 cycles.

In 1983 Council decided to abandon the regional street boulevard irrigation system in lieu of the estimated $5 million replacement and repair cost.

In 1992 City Council amended the Boulevard Maintenance By-Law, transferring responsibility for frontage boulevard maintenance on collector streets to homeowners.

During the 90's, boulevard mowing was reduced from 14 to 10 cycles; boulevard spring cleanup was cut by 50%, boulevard repair and restoration by 90% and herbiciding by 54%.

In 2000 and 2001, City Council again amended the By-Law, eliminating the inner city exempt area for frontage boulevard maintenance and subsequently transferred responsibility to homeowners for flankage boulevards on collector streets.

In addition to current budget reductions, capital programs for boulevard restoration were also eliminated. A boulevard restoration program of $300,000 annually through the city capital budget and the Take Pride Winnipeg program for image routes and boulevard enhancement of $500,000 were cut in the mid 90's.

In recent years, funding for boulevard maintenance has remained flat and new inventory has been absorbed without budget increases further eroding maintenance levels.

DISCUSSION:

1. **Current Service Levels**

A) Herbicide Treatments

Over the last 4 years, the Parks and Open Space Division has treated on average, 1064 hectares of park and boulevard property annually with herbicides. This amounts to a 54% reduction in area treated when compared to 1988 figures (2300 Hectares) when service levels were at a sustainable level. In 2002, there were 3800 public complaints pertaining to weed control issues compared with 2600 such complaints in 1988.

The spraying program is carried out in 2 seasons (Spring and Fall). The spring program (mid-May to mid-June) is reactionary in nature and is driven primarily by citizen complaints. Spring spraying is effective, but slightly less so than the fall program.

The fall program (mid-August to the end of September) is more proactive and effective due to the life-cycle stage of the plant. Areas treated in the fall will typically remain at an acceptable re-infestation level for 2 to 3 years.

On average, the following boulevard categories are treated with herbicides at the frequency indicated:

Regional Street boulevards – once every 5 years
Collector Street boulevards – once every 7 years
Residential boulevards – once every 10 years

Given the above frequencies, boulevards have become more weed infested each year.

B) Current Operating Budget – long term budget decrease and consequences

- Current Operating Budget for Weed Control in 1988 - $720,000
- Current Operating Budget for Weed Control in 2003 - $691,029

Considering budget reductions and the compounding inflationary factor over the last 15 years, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Services (formerly Weed Control) operates with 50% less funding in real terms than 1988. This, coupled with an increase in park and boulevard inventory, has affected the ability to achieve a more desirable level of weed control.

C) Boulevard Mowing and Horticultural Maintenance

Present budget resources only allow for regional boulevards to be mowed on a 14-day cycle. This translates into boulevards being mowed on average 9 - 10 times annually. The rate of growth of dandelions, and weeds in general, exceeds that of turf and therefore creates an unkempt appearance; particularly in the mid-May to late June period when peak growth rates are realized. Fourteen (14) mowing cycles per year is the desirable and sustainable service level (World class standard is weekly mowing from May to mid-October or 24 mowing cycles).

Over the years, horticultural maintenance, including aeration, top dressing, fertilizing, turf repair and irrigation, has been reduced by 80 – 95% (irrigation on regional boulevards was eliminated by City Council in 1983 in lieu of an estimated $5 million replacement and repair cost.)

In the late 90's, spring boulevard abrasive cleanup was reduced by 50%.

Minimal boulevard repair is carried out only to address safety and liability concerns.

D) Public vs. Private City Lots

All public properties are addressed (mowed and/or sprayed) by the Department prior to acting on non-compliant private property owners with respect to the Noxious Weed Act.

Although not obligated under the Act to issue notice beyond the "Official Notice to Control Weeds" which is advertised in the local newspapers, the Department further issues a "Courtesy Weed Notice" to offending property owners. This notice comes with a minimum 3-day grace period allowing for remedial action by the subject owner.

2. <u>Public Opinion/Perception</u>

To solicit public opinion on weed control issues a survey was conducted via telephone between Dec. 5 and Dec. 13, 2001. A summary of this survey follows. This information is included to illustrate the level of support for weed control as well as concerns expressed.

<u>Summary of Results</u>

- (83.7%) support spraying herbicides in Parks and Open Spaces every three to five years or more often. Only 8.1% thought no herbicides should be used.

- Only (47%) are satisfied with weed control in City of Winnipeg Parks and Open Spaces. 23.3% were unsatisfied.

- A majority of 60.5% would not accept a significant increase in dandelions if the use of herbicides were reduced considerably. 29.5% would accept this.

- Almost one half of respondents were not concerned about the use of herbicides, but almost a third were somewhat or very concerned about the use of herbicides on City parks and boulevards.

- Just over one third of respondents (36.9%) thought excessive weed infestation is a safety issue on athletic fields while just under one third (31.8%) disagreed.

- The majority (70.6%) felt that sound management combined with the targeted use of herbicides was essential to maintaining acceptable turf. Only 9% disagreed with this approach.

- A majority (53.0%) would support a small increase of .75% on their tax bill for increased mowing watering, aerating and fertilizing. However, one third (33.8%) opposed this.

Financial Impact Statement **Date:** **June 23, 2003**

Project Name:

Boulevard Maintenance Practices

COMMENTS:

There is no financial impact as this report is for information only.

:Original signed by Darcy Stewart, CA"
Manager of Finance & Administration

Approved by Divisional Accountant Trainee: ☑

In preparing this report, there was consultation with and concurrence by:

N/A

This Report Submitted by:

Department:	Public Works Department
Division:	Parks and Open Space Division
Prepared by:	Jeff Swereda
Processed by:	
File No.:	Blvd Mtce Practices Report