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Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works Committee,

Snow, ice, and slush are defining features of winter in Winnipeg. Sidewalks in the City are a vital part of public infrastructure that provide access to publics goods, services, and a range of socio-economic activities, including health care, education, employment, and places of worship – to name only a few. Put differently, sidewalks facilitate access to human rights, which means safe and accessible sidewalks is a human rights issue. Excessive snow and ice on Winnipeg's sidewalks can be barriers to rights realization that have a disproportionate impact on specific groups, including parents and other carers with children in tow, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Accessibility is a human right. It is also a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society, and for the effective enjoyment of a broad range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. For these reasons, it is unsurprising that accessibility features prominently in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a human rights treaty to which Canada is a signatory, and which the city of Winnipeg is obligated to respect. Article 9 of the Convention requires all levels of government in Canada to take proactive measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment and public transportation. Along similar lines, Article 6 of the Accessible Canada Act makes clear that all persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, and that the laws, policies, programs, services and structures must take into account the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities. These positive obligations require municipal governments to identify and remove any and all barriers to accessibility, whether in law, policy, or everyday practice, to ensure rights realization.

For these reasons I support the motion for further research and a pilot project on alternative policies and practices for snow and ice removal on Winnipeg sidewalks. I also encourage Council to view this motion as an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive 'human rights review' of its snow and ice clearing policy, in consultation with key stakeholders including persons with disabilities, to incorporate the accessibility standards set forth in the Accessible Canada Act to ensure both in policy and practice the highest level of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,



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