

Matcom Snow Removal from Pedestrian Walkways Survey

What We Learned

Survey

Matcom conducted a survey of Ithacans' views on pedestrian snow removal. Fortuitously, we published the survey just before a major snowstorm (in November 2019). We got 800+ responses from a wide cross-section of the Ithaca Community. We were preparing a report to Council on the survey results when we were interrupted by Covid. Matcom resumed meeting in October 2020, and approved this report at its April 2021 meeting.

Background

Plan Ithaca prioritizes active transportation over motor vehicles.

“A fundamental goal is to achieve a sustainable system offering viable alternatives to private automobile trips.”

In January 2019, the CA committee approved a CPF (Commission Project Form) for Matcom on Pedestrian Snow Removal. It asked --

“Are the main issues with lack of sidewalk clearing by property owners? Large piles of snow at curb cuts and corners? Other issues? And does the public want the City government to take on more of the responsibility for keeping pedestrian routes open, or to enforce more vigorously the regulations that exist? How much more is the public willing to pay?”

What we learned --

- 1) It's hard for pedestrians to get around Ithaca in snow season.
 - Uncleared sidewalks are a big problem.
 - Uncleared intersections are the biggest problem.
 - It often stays hard to get around for days after a snowfall.
 - It's harder with a wheel chair, walker, baby carriage or grocery cart.
 - It's harder for seniors, people with disabilities, and women.
- 2) The public is not satisfied with enforcement of the current system.
 - Some property owners are scofflaws, especially some absentee landlords.
 - For some property owners, clearing snow is a hardship.
 - A single uncleared property or intersection can make an entire block impassable.
 - Many people misunderstand the current law.
 - Even if the city expands its role, effective enforcement will still be needed.

There are key problems better enforcement will not solve.

- 1) Each property on a block clears its snow at a different time. As new snow continues to fall, the first areas cleared may be blocked again by the time others are cleared. Even if everyone fully complies with the law, there may be no time when it is possible to walk the entire block unobstructed.

- 2) The hardest part of getting around Ithaca in the snow is getting across the street at intersections. Often, the obstruction is mounded snow & slush where the sidewalk meets the street. Often that obstruction remains for days after the traffic lanes and sidewalks are clear.

A pivotal clarification: When people complain about curb cuts, typically, their problem is not precisely the curb cut, but the area in the street beyond the curb cut. Property owners are responsible for clearing sidewalks and curb cuts. DPW clears traffic & parking lanes, but does not have equipment, staffing or budget to entirely clear crosswalks. No one at all is responsible for clearing the ends of the crosswalks between the curb cut and the traffic lane. No one at all is responsible for seeing to it that the whole street is crossable at the crosswalk.



The single biggest problem for pedestrians in the snow is obstructions beyond the curb line at intersections, which often remain for days after other areas are cleared. Better enforcement of the current system will do nothing to fix that.

There is broad support for change

The public is not satisfied with the current system
The public strongly supports study of alternatives with a larger City responsibility.
How much the public is willing to pay depends on what service is offered.

New CPF –

Matcom plans to draft a new CPF for Matcom to work with appropriate staff to explore options, research efforts in other cities, develop cost estimates, and address unanswered questions.

Selected Survey Results

Getting Around	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Pedestrian walkways are cleared of snow and ice to a degree that I can easily get around – All respondents	36%	55%
Same question – Women only	35%	59%
Same question – People over 65 only	32%	63%
Same question – People with disabilities only	15%	76%
Crossing the Street	Somewhat or very satisfied	Somewhat or very dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with snow and ice removal from sidewalks in the City of Ithaca?	28%	60%
How satisfied are you with snow and ice removal from crosswalks in the City of Ithaca?	58%	29%
How satisfied are you with snow and ice removal from curb cuts in the City of Ithaca?	13%	75%
Enforcement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with the city's responsiveness to inquiries and complaints related to snow removal from pedestrian walkways	7%	24%
I am satisfied with the city's enforcement of ordinances related to snow removal from pedestrian walkways	7%	53%
I am satisfied with the city's fine of \$50-100 per offense for property owners who repeatedly don't clear sidewalks in a timely fashion	40%	28%
Support for Change	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
I believe the current way of relying on property owners to keep pedestrian walkways clear in the winter is sufficient	18%	63%
I support further study of the cost and feasibility for the City of Ithaca to take over responsibility for snow removal of pedestrian walkways	70%	19%