

Walkway Policies and Other Programs

ISSUE

This report outlines possible changes to the walkway evaluation and closure policy, walkway maintenance policy, and other programs to address maintenance, graffiti, vandalism, crime, and enhance the overall feeling of safety in City of Saskatoon neighbourhoods.

BACKGROUND

History

The Active Transportation Plan (AT Plan), approved by City Council in June 2016, identified an action item “to preserve and enhance walkways through neighbourhoods”. Walkways facilitate pedestrian movement and add to the walkability of neighbourhoods by shortening walking distances and providing connections to parks, schools, community centres and commercial services. The AT Plan stated that the City should avoid closing walkways wherever possible.

City Council, at its Preliminary Business Plan and Budget Meeting held on November 26, 2018, considered the Graffiti Management Program and Service Level Report and resolved:

- “1. That the current service level for graffiti management, as identified in this report, be maintained and approved; and
2. That the Administration report back in 2019 regarding the long-term funding to support the current service level, including social enterprise options.”

At its Regular Business Meeting held on October 28, 2019, City Council considered a notice of motion by Councillor R. Donauer – Possible Changes to Walkway Policy, and resolved:

“That the Administration report in the first quarter of 2020 on possible changes to our walkway policy or other policies that addresses maintenance, graffiti, vandalism, crime and enhancing the overall feeling of safety in our neighbourhoods including the data of all existing files.”

The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, at its meeting held on April 6, 2020, received an information report regarding possible changes to the Walkway Policy, which stated that a follow-up report was tentatively planned for the first half of 2021.

Current Status

Walkways are identified by the City as a public right-of-way established to facilitate pedestrian movement. These walkways are an important asset to the active transportation network for several reasons, including:

- making active transportation more attractive by reducing walking distances to various destinations such as schools, places of worship, civic centres, libraries, commercial centres, parks, and transit stations;

- providing a safe travel route by minimizing exposure to traffic; and
- typically improving accessibility for users with mobility challenges.

Walkway Closures

Council Policy C07-017, Walkway Evaluation and Closure provides a framework for residents living adjacent to walkways to express interest in closing walkways adjacent to their properties.

Several residents have expressed concerns regarding the walkways adjacent to their homes. Concerns such as criminal activity (break in, robbery, vandalism, graffiti, alcohol, and drug use), nuisance behaviours (noise, litter), and feeling threatened. These residents attribute their feeling of a lack of safety to the activities in the walkway. These residents are interested in pursuing walkway closures; however, they have also expressed that the following aspects of the Walkway Evaluation and Closure policy are too restrictive:

- Application fee (\$2,000), which is applied whether or not closure proceeds;
- Requirement that vandalism, graffiti, illegal activity, or a public safety issue must be deemed unmanageable by Saskatoon Police Service;
- Reliance on the community meeting to decide whether or not the walkway closure will proceed; and
- Requirement that all adjacent property owners must support closure.

Walkway Maintenance

Council Policy C07-021, Walkway Maintenance outlines the maintenance service levels for primary and secondary walkways.

Public Engagement

Community engagement is an essential component of the existing Walkway Evaluation and Closure policy. If the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) identifies that the illegal activity, vandalism, or public safety issues happening in the walkway are unmanageable for a one-year period, a walkway will be considered for closure. If a walkway is being considered for closure, a community meeting is held to inform the residents of the walkway issues and discuss options to improve the safety of the walkway. The SPS evaluates these issues in part based on calls and complaints received by SPS.

Approaches in Other Jurisdictions

A jurisdictional scan of approaches used in other municipalities for walkway policies and programs is included in Appendix 1.

OPTIONS

The Administration considered a variety of options to ensure walkways are maintained, safe and perceived to be safe. These options included illumination, graffiti vandalism removal, community association support, crime reporting support, walkway closures, and other considerations. Details on the various options, including the pros and cons for each option, are provided in Appendix 2.

Based on the extensive review and various options considered, Administration is putting forward, for consideration, a number of recommendations regarding both policy and program changes.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council:

1. That the current practice for illumination continues, in which pole-top lighting with an appropriate power source will only be considered under very specific circumstances and only if it will effectively address the issues of concern without impacting the adjacent residents;
2. That maintenance crews check walkways for graffiti vandalism as part of their regular maintenance program and report it via the Facilities' Graffiti Tracker;
3. That an education and awareness toolkit be prepared to improve community cohesion;
4. That Crime Reporting Support Materials be prepared to encourage residents to report crime and to report appropriately;
5. That Council Policy C07-017, Walkway Evaluation and Closure be replaced with a petition model format rather than the current criteria which requires vandalism, graffiti vandalism, illegal activity, or public safety issues which are deemed unmanageable by Saskatoon Police Service before being considered for closure;
6. That the Administration administer the petition model for up to two applications in 2021 on a first-come, first-serve basis; and
7. That wayfinding signage be installed in walkways where appropriate, and that guidelines to determine the appropriate locations for wayfinding signage be included in the Active Transportation Wayfinding Strategy.

RATIONALE

The combination of the recommendations will:

- provide active monitoring of graffiti vandalism;
- support residents with graffiti vandalism removal;
- provide community associations with a variety of tools to improve community cohesion;
- encourage residents to report crimes to assist in capturing trends;
- eliminate the initial financial burden of the walkway closure process;
- guide walkway users in finding their way in the transportation network; and
- provide residents with a mechanism to explore/pursue walkway closure if there is adequate community support.

Additional details about the recommendations are included in Appendix 2.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of the recommended options are:

- Illumination – Pole-top lighting is \$7,000 per light, funded through Capital Project #2234 – Walkway Management. Currently, there are no outstanding lighting recommendations so no impact to the approved project budget.
- Pro-actively Check for Graffiti Vandalism in Walkways – The estimated cost to provide this service is \$1,000 per year for the Road Maintenance Service Line, which can be managed in existing budgets.
- Community Association Education and Awareness Communications Toolkit – The costs for preparing the resources for the toolkit are to be confirmed, but a preliminary estimate is \$5,000.
- Crime Reporting Supporting Materials – The costs for preparing the Crime Reporting Support Materials will be funded through the Neighbourhood Safety operating budget as part of the Neighbourhood Planning program. \$5,000 would be needed to cover printing costs.
- Walkway Policy Petition Model – Capital Project #2234, Walkway Management can fund up to two applications per year in the existing budget allocation. Redirecting these funds to address closure requests will reduce the funds available for walkway updates, such as bollards, surface improvements, illumination, drainage repairs, etc. Additional funding may be required if more applications are received.
- Wayfinding Signage – The guidelines to determine the appropriate locations for wayfinding signage will be included in the Active Transportation Wayfinding Strategy which is funded in the 2021 budget for Capital Project #2468 – Active Transportation Plan Implementation.

ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

The recommendations will require a revision to Policy C07-017, Walkway Evaluation and Closure.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

To be determined based upon City Council direction.

APPENDICES

1. Appendix 1 – Walkway Closure Jurisdictional Scan Summary
2. Appendix 2 – Walkway Policies and Programs Options

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