

Removal of ticketed vehicles during residential parking bans waste of tax dollars, councillor says

## Snow-clearing 'courtesy tows' not free

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**CHRIS KITCHING** Published January 4, 2022

AWINNIPEG city councillor wants drivers to start footing the bill when their vehicles are towed during residential parking bans.

For years, the city has offered and absorbed the cost of “courtesy tows,” in which vehicles are taken to a nearby street to make way for plows and trucks involved in snow-clearing operations.

Registered owners are given a \$200 ticket (\$150 if paid early) for violating a ban, but the city covers the towing costs.

Coun. Janice Lukes (Waverley West) has called for an end to the “courtesy tow” practice, arguing it is a waste of taxpayers’ money and no longer warranted. She will table a motion at the Jan. 7 Assiniboia community committee meeting calling on the city to charge the full cost to vehicle owners.

Lukes said the city offers enough advance warning and information to Winnipeggers when vehicles must be removed from residential streets after heavy snowfall. She pointed to tools such as the city’s Know Your Zone program and app — which lists the snow-related parking bans in effect — as well as its website, 311 phone line and social-media campaigns.

“I had a lot of residents who called me after the last residential parking ban and were upset that vehicles weren’t moved,” she said. “It’s time that the city charges people for moving their vehicles.”

The tows cost taxpayers more than \$930,000 in 2021, almost triple the \$316,655 it cost them in 2020, Lukes said.

The totals in 2019 and 2018 were \$467,513 and \$89,675, respectively. The annual cost depends on the number of residential parking bans and the number of vehicles towed. Lukes has asked city staff to provide figures for the number of “courtesy tows” in each of those four years.

“It’s free to the person whose vehicle has been towed, but the taxpayer ends up paying for it,” she said. “It complicates matters when vehicles aren’t moved.” Windrows are left behind when plows go around vehicles that haven’t been moved. In some past bans, so many vehicles were still parked on residential streets tow trucks didn’t have enough time to move all of them, said Lukes.

Coun. Scott Gillingham (St. James), chairman of the three-person Assiniboia committee, said he will support the motion.

“It’s about being a good neighbour. When people don’t take the time to move their vehicle it results in a substandard snow-clearing operation,” he said.

However, the third committee member, Coun. Kevin Klein (Charleswood-Tuxedo-Westwood), said he will not support the motion.

“We’re just not ready for it,” he said, adding the city could do more to improve notifications and awareness of residential parking bans.

“Not everybody communicates that way,” he said, referring to the online Know Your Zone program. “We can’t just say, ‘It’s on the web.’” According to Lukes’ motion, the city’s population is growing and becoming “denser and more compact.”

Streets must be cleared quickly and efficiently to make sure they are passable for Winnipeg Transit buses and emergency vehicles, it states.

It will ask the public service to identify any policy changes that would be necessary before the city could begin charging vehicle owners for tows.

The motion will also call on the city to develop a process to track the number of tows, calculate how much they would have cost taxpayers and divert that amount towards snow and ice removal.