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The Editorial Board: Buffalo should clear the city's sidewalks of snow

News Editorial Board

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Every year, after every snowstorm, Buffalonians who walk – one-third of the city’s residents – must rely on property owners to **shovel their sidewalks**. If the sidewalks aren’t shoveled, pedestrians must struggle through slippery snow-packed sidewalks or take their chances by walking – even more dangerously – in the streets.

Falls and near-misses are common; in December 2020, pedestrians in the street on Middlesex were hit and badly injured.

And it’s not just an issue for those who don’t drive. Everybody uses the city’s sidewalks. Buffalo’s leadership needs to step in. Other municipalities with snowy winters have taken action, including neighbors Rochester and Syracuse, both of which have municipal sidewalk clearing programs.

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John Strokowski shovels snow off sidewalks on Allen Street in Buffalo on Nov. 23. Like the cities of Rochester and Syracuse, Buffalo should take on the task of clearing sidewalks of snow.

Joseph Cooke / Buffalo News

Residents here are getting sick of being outliers in an area where they should be setting the standard. It's ridiculous. Of all the cities in the country, Buffalo should have been among the first to initiate a sidewalk snow clearance program. Like it or not, our national reputation for snow is well-deserved. And we like to brag that it's not a big deal for us.

Such a service will cost money, but the municipal amenities upon which we all rely are never free. That's why we have property taxes; in Rochester, the sidewalk clearing fees are part of the annual tax bill at about 9 cents per foot of each property's front footage. It averages out at about \$36 per property.

It must be noted that property owners in both Rochester and Syracuse are still responsible for clearing their sidewalks; city snow clearance provides supplemental help. But in Buffalo, such an addition would help solve the issue of absentee owners who pay taxes, but don't shovel, as well as address many other cases where shoveling just isn't happening.

Residents have been calling for this service for years – and indicated they would be willing to pay for it. As Elmwood Village resident Cynthia Van Ness stated in a recent News article, “... taxpayers who are inside motor vehicles are entitled to rights-of-ways cleared at public expense. And taxpayers who are outside of motor vehicles are not.”

The city did do a pilot for sidewalks on major thoroughfares from 2015-2019, but it was discontinued with no plan for the future. Now, Mayor Byron Brown states it’s not on his administration’s to-do list.

Making the sidewalks safe for residents in a city that regularly gets blanketed with snow should always be on Brown’s to-do list. It should be a top priority.

Talk to Rochester and Syracuse. Make a plan – before more accidents occur.

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