



GEORGINA

Subject: Operation of Snowmobiles on Town Roadways

To: Mayor and Council

From: Mike Hutchinson, Manager, Municipal Law Enforcement

Date: April 2, 2025

Briefing:

On January 15th, 2025, Council passed Resolution No. C2025-0007 to “receive the delegation from Town resident Iryna Eydtt requesting that Town Council consider instituting regulations for the operation of snowmobiles and off-road vehicles on municipal boulevards and roadways and refer her request to staff for further investigation and a response back to Council and to the resident.”

As the Town of Georgina is currently holding a pilot project for the use of off-road vehicles on certain Town highways, this briefing note will focus solely on the use of snowmobiles on Town highways. (An update on the off-road vehicle pilot project will be presented to Council at an upcoming Council Meeting later this spring.)

It is important to differentiate between snowmobiles and off-road vehicles. Snowmobiles and off-road vehicles are not considered one and the same. There is specific provincial legislation regulating the use of snowmobiles and specific provincial legislation regulating the use of off-road vehicles.

The *Motorized Snow Vehicles Act* permits snowmobiles to operate on most highways across the province. Users are not permitted to operate snowmobiles on the serviced part of the roadway on King’s Highways or secondary provincial highways unless they cross at a 90-degree angle. In Georgina, this would apply to Highway 48. Operators of snowmobiles on highways must be 16 years old and have either a driver’s licence or a motorized snow vehicle operator’s licence and the snowmobile must be registered with and have a permit from the province, as well as insurance. Like off-road vehicles, the speed that a snowmobile may travel along the highway is limited to 20 km/hour where the posted speed limit is 50 km/hour or less and 50 km/hour where the posted speed limit is 50+ km/hour.

Municipalities have the authority to further govern the use of snowmobiles within their municipal boundaries. The Council of the Town of Georgina enacted a snowmobile by-law in 2003 with the purpose of prohibiting snowmobiles from being operated on the sidewalk. Similarly to the *Motorized Snow Vehicles Act*, the by-law may only be enforced by a police officer. The Town’s Public Parks By-law prohibits the use of motorized vehicles within Town parks and trails, and this by-law can be enforced by both the Municipal Law Enforcement Division and York Regional Police.

The province has given municipalities the authority to address local problems as they arise in each municipality, and other municipalities around Lake Simcoe have, like the Town of Georgina, enacted snowmobile by-laws, including the City of Barrie, the City of Orillia, the Township of Brock, and the Town of Innisfil. None of these municipalities have strictly prohibited snowmobiles from their Town highways; some have prohibited snowmobiles from operating on highways overnight, while one has prohibited them from operating on boulevards in urban areas, and another has prohibited their operation on all boulevards throughout the municipality. One municipality has required that snowmobiles may only be operated on a road allowance for the purpose of travelling from the operator's residence to an approved trail or a lake and to return from such trail or lake. Municipalities have the option of prohibiting snowmobiles from being operated on specific highways within their boundaries, such as through their downtown cores. Municipalities may also set the speed limit of snowmobiles to be lower than the provincial standard.

In Georgina, the Municipal Law Enforcement Division does not typically receive a lot of complaints regarding snowmobiles. Historically, staff receive a maximum of five complaints each winter, however this winter there has been less than that, which is surprising as we have received more snow this winter than in recent years. The complaints that the Municipal Law Enforcement Division receive usually involve snowmobiles riding through Town parks or driving across private property, which the Municipal Law Enforcement Division cannot enforce. Complaints received regarding snowmobiles are not typically for snowmobiles operating on Town highways or boulevards.

Snowmobiling is a culturally significant recreational activity in the Town of Georgina. Based on anecdotal information, the Town of Georgina's Economic Development Division believes that many snowmobilers are accessing Lake Simcoe for ice fishing. Ice fishing enthusiasts that visit Georgina have an impact on our economy during the winter season, and tightening the rules on the use of snowmobiles may be detrimental to local tourism.

Town of Georgina Zoning By-law 500 was amended in 2017 to permit the storage of recreational vehicles, including snowmobiles, in front yards and driveways. There are occasions when the requirements for permanent storage of leisure vehicles cannot be met due to setback restrictions; however, in most cases, snowmobiles are permitted to be stored seasonally in a front yard between November 1st and March 31st. If Council decided to prohibit the use of snowmobiles on Town highways, it would be inconsistent with the changes made to the Zoning By-law that acknowledge the recreational nature of our community. Although owners of snowmobiles would be able to store snowmobiles in their front yards, if prohibited from operation on Town highways, they would have to trailer their snowmobiles to Lake Simcoe to be used on the ice or trailer them to trail entrances. This would create further congestion in the Waterfront Park Buffer Zone and in the parking lots of our waterfront parks, where many ice users park in the winter months.

Considering that Council and staff have only received one request from the public to prohibit snowmobiles from operating on Town highways and boulevards, staff are not recommending further restrictions on the use of snowmobiles beyond the current prohibition of operating on sidewalks. It is not ideal for snowmobiles to operate on a paved shoulder and the boulevard is preferred to prevent damage to the snowmobile.

Should Council direct staff to propose further regulations regarding the operation of snowmobiles on Town highways, staff will be prepared to draft such proposals for Council's consideration. Currently, prohibiting snowmobiles from operating on Town highways and boulevards does not appear to be a priority for residents within the municipality.