

Emerging Snow Removal Concerns

Residents of Riverside Park and Hunt Club neighbourhoods who rely on the services of professional snow removal companies received unwelcomed news in the last few weeks. It would appear that everyone in a given neighbourhood is being driven to a single company ... and almost everyone is getting hit with dramatic rate hikes – some as high as 75%!

Many residents are reporting the same concern: that snow removal companies are working together to divide up neighbourhoods in order to concentrate their service, and that they are sharing company pricing, service models, business strategy, and personal customer information in the process.

Many residents have been alarmed by the issue ... and believe that it may be illegal, at least according to this media 2017 release from the federal Competition Bureau: <https://www.canada.ca/en/competition-bureau/news/2017/03/snow-removal-businesses-avoid-a-flurry-of-problems-steer-clear-of-illegal.html>.

Some residents are asking the [Competition Bureau to investigate](#).

This is what we are hearing from many residents in each neighbourhood:

All of the long-time customers of Company X and Y, will receive letters from their provider explaining that they no longer service their area and recommending that the customer hire Company Z for the 2019-2020 season. These letters are identical, even when they appear on different company letterhead. Included in the envelope is a contract from Company Z, containing personal information of the client (name, address, telephone, email) and quoting a price that is often significantly higher than the previous company's contract.

At the same time, long-time customers of Company Z, are receiving renewal contracts that also have big rate hikes. When the resident calls around to competitors (Companies X and Y), they are being turned away.

In adjacent neighbourhoods, the situation is reversed (Companies X and Z refer all business to Company Y; or Companies Y and Z refer customers to Company X). Dozens of residents of Riverside Park have come forward with the same report, and we've heard of this in Hunt Club and Alta Vista, but no one knows how widespread it is.

In every scenario, customers are left without any choice because all competition has been removed from the market.

How to File an Anti-Competition Complaint with the Competition Bureau:

Complaints regarding non-competitive commercial practices (a.k.a. "price fixing" or "bid-rigging") fall within the authority of the Competition Bureau of Canada, which is responsible for

enforcement of the federal *Competition Act*. Information about the work of the Competition Bureau is available at the following link:

<https://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/04296.html>

Some of the anti-competitive activities that seem most relevant are:

Price fixing

When competitors agree on the prices that they will charge their customers.

Bid-rigging

When, in response to a call or request for bids or tenders, one or more bidders agree not to submit a bid, or two or more bidders agree to submit bids that have been prearranged among themselves.

Abuse of dominant position

When a dominant firm engages in anti-competitive practices that substantially lessen competition in a market, or are likely to do so.

How to File a Complaint:

Click below to file an online complaint to the Competition Bureau:

<https://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/frm-eng/GHÉT-7TDNA5>

Step 1: Complainant's Information

There are additional fields that are intended for companies filing complaints about competitors. Simply skip the unnecessary fields to fill in your personal contact information.

Step 2: Company or Person Complained Against

You can either focus your complaint on the companies who have refused to provide service to your community, or

You can focus on complaining about a company sharing your personal information with a competitor.

J.R. Lawn Maintenance & Snow Removal Inc.

Owner: Joey Roberge

Address: 2051 Saunderson Dr, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 2E5

Phone: 613-229-4803

info@jrlawnandsnow.com

Andy's Home Renovations

Address: 69 Jamie Ave, Nepean, ON K2E 7Y6

Phone: (613) 224-2232

info@andyslawnandsnow.ca

Odie's Landscape & Snow Removal

Owner: Steve Oderkirk

Address: 2659 Flannery Dr, Ottawa, Ontario K1V 8L9

Phone: 613-247-9762

Steve@odies.ca

Step 3: Details of Your Complaint

Explain your situation in your own words. Be clear, concise and precise.

It is recommended that you type out your complaint in a separate file and then cut/paste into the web portal. This will be easier to save if you have to leave it and come back to it. It also guards against any glitches when you submit. It will also retain a copy for your records.

Touch these points:

- I am filing a complaint about **companies Y and Z**.
- I would like them to be investigated for the following anti-competitive activities (see list on competition bureau website: <https://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/04296.html>)
- Indicate the estimated length of service of your previous snow removal company, as well as the contract cost for the 2018-2019 season **(include contract, if possible)**.
- Explain what happened this year. Ie. Received a letter on **X date** from **Company Y** notifying of cancelled service to my area for 2019-2020 and encouraging me to take my business to **Company Z (include, copies of documentation)**.
- Note the price difference from last year to this year.
- Explain any steps you took to get clarification from **Company Y (include copy of correspondence)**.
- Explain any steps you took to get estimates from competitors **(include copy of responses received)**.
- Outline your concerns, which may include: collusion or coordination between companies to shut out competition and gain exclusivity in a given region; sharing of private customer information; lack of option; denial of service; price fixing, bid-rigging, sharing of pricing and service information between companies (include all that apply to our situation).
- Include a brief statement about why this situation is offensive to you (here we are trying to add a personal touch, with added moral weight to our concerns).
- If appropriate, add a personal explanation of the negative impact the lack of competition is having on you (examples such as: you are a senior on a fixed income; you are a new parent who can't afford the time to do their own plowing; you have a hip issue that prevents physical exertion; etc).
- Add any additional information and documentation that is appropriate.