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Town of Aurora

# General Committee Report

No. OPS23-020

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**Subject:** Potential Snow Windrow Removal Assistance Pilot Program

**Prepared by:** Luigi Colangelo, Manager of Public Works

**Department:** Operational Services

**Date:** September 19, 2023

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## Recommendation

1. That Report No. OPS23-020 be received; and
2. That Council consider the implementation of one (1) of the options presented in this report and provide direction to staff; and
3. That should Council choose to implement a Snow Windrow Removal Pilot, staff would recommend Option 5 Windrow Removal (In-House Staff) as a pilot program for the 2023/24 winter season to be funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve.

## Executive Summary

This report provides Council with information on the feasibility of introducing a snow windrow removal assistance pilot program for seniors or those with disabilities. The report focuses on a comparative analysis of other municipalities that currently offer this service as well as the benefits, challenges and costs implications associated with this enhanced level of service:

- Municipalities are obligated to maintain road networks under the provisions of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.
- The Town previously trialed a windrow removal program in 2008-2009 winter season, deciding not to continue with full implementation due to little interest from the senior population.
- Total complaints received for 2022-2023 winter season were minimal based on population.

- Windrow programs for seniors/persons with disabilities vary in scope and service level in York Region.
- Various factors considered by staff in determining the potential feasibility of implementing a snow clearing program for residential driveway entrances.
- Potential program delivery options can assist residents with windrow snow removal.
- Many unknown aspects make it difficult to predict the costs of implementing a windrow program.
- Towns potential windrow clearing program would follow a similar delivery model to other York Region Municipalities.

## Background

**Municipalities are obligated to maintain road networks under the provisions of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.**

The Town is obligated to maintain its road networks under the provisions of the *Municipal Act, 2001*. Maintenance includes winter control services to ensure a minimum level of safety for motorists and pedestrians, pursuant to O.Reg. 239/02: Minimum Maintenance Standards for Municipal Highways (the "MMS"). Providing a safe road network mitigates liability for the Town.

A class of road hierarchy exists in the Town and is based on the volume of traffic and speed. Two classes are defined as Primary Roads and Secondary Roads, for the purpose of winter operations roads classified as Primary are serviced within 16 hrs and Secondary within 24 hrs.

The MMS does not require a municipality to clear snow windrows at driveways, senior's driveways or persons with disabilities. Though not obligated, the Town could choose to offer such an enhanced service.

**The Town previously trialed a windrow removal program in 2008-2009 winter season, deciding not to continue with full implementation due to little interest from the senior population.**

During the 2008-2009 winter season, the Town piloted a windrow snow clearing program for seniors based on subsidized cost recovery model in which residents were

required to pay \$70/annually. A total of 39 residents registered for the program, far below the estimated 0.5%-1% population uptake (250-500 households) based on experiences in other communities and the demographics of Aurora.

The program was cancelled due to lack of interest and high level of administration relating to registrations, complaint resolution and communications. Time spent on administration was five (5) times higher than what was required to remove snow. Actual time spent clearing snow was 20 hours for that season, while administration required 100 hours by front line staff. It should be noted there were only five (5) events requiring snow removal in 2008-2009.

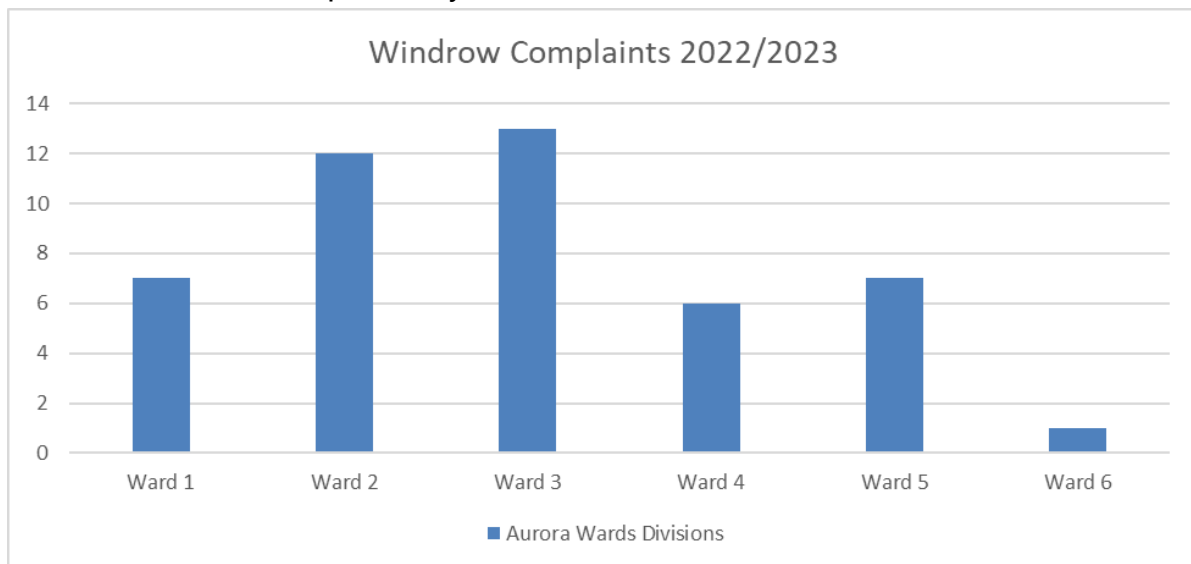
Survey of the participants also found 67% did not find the program beneficial, 42% indicated service took too long and only 25% would participate the following year.

### Analysis

**Total complaints received for 2022-2023 winter season were minimal based on population.**

Customer Service recorded 50 formal complaints related to the Town not providing a windrow removal service. It should be noted that staff do not have the age demographic background of the residents, but it can be assumed it came from a broad cross section of people.

Table 1: Windrow Complaints by Ward 2022/2023



In addition, a petition was formally submitted in May to the Clerks Division supporting a senior's/disability windrow removal program. The document includes approximately 140 signatures from all areas in Town. Staff have not been able to confirm if the petition signatures in support were from seniors or those with medical/physical conditions.

### **Windrow programs for seniors/persons with disabilities vary in scope and service level in York Region.**

Driveway windrow clearing has been a topic of much discussion and a difficult issue for many years in all urban municipalities. Some municipalities have implemented full windrow removal programs for all residents, while others have reduced the scope of the windrow removal program to only service seniors or persons with medical/mobility related limitations. Staff have collected information from neighbouring municipalities that have implemented programs. Of note is that the programs only clear the windrow for one (1) vehicle or up to 3m width.

Municipalities with existing programs that were consulted for this investigation include:

Table 2: York Region Windrow Program Data

Municipality	Windrow Methodology
King Township	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 65 yrs of age or disability</li> <li>• Service delivered by staff</li> <li>• Level of service target - 24 hrs after snow stops</li> <li>• Approximately 110 household participate</li> </ul>
Whitchurch-Stouffville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 65 yrs of age or disability</li> <li>• Service delivered by contactor</li> <li>• Level of service target – 12 hrs after snow stops</li> <li>• Approximately 400 households participate</li> </ul>
Georgina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 65 yrs of age or disability</li> <li>• Service delivered by contactor</li> <li>• Level of service target – 12 hrs after snow stops</li> <li>• Approximately 500 households participate</li> </ul>
Markham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60 yrs of age or disability</li> <li>• Service delivered by contactor</li> <li>• Level of service target – dispatched 8 hrs after road plows and 16 hrs to complete</li> <li>• Approximately 6,800 households participate</li> </ul>

Municipality	Windrow Methodology
Richmond Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City wide clearing program for all households</li> <li>• Service delivered by staff</li> <li>• Level of service target – 16 hrs after snow stops</li> <li>• Approximately 55,500 households</li> </ul>
Vaughan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City wide clearing program for all households</li> <li>• Service delivered by contractor</li> <li>• Level of service target – 16 hrs after snow stops</li> <li>• Approximately 80,000 households</li> </ul>

\*Newmarket/East Gwillimbury do not have a windrow program of any form.

Costs associated with delivering a windrow program vary greatly between municipalities due to volume, level of service, method of delivery of service. Windrow clearing costs range from \$25-\$140/driveway per season.

#### **Various factors considered by staff in determining the potential feasibility of implementing a snow clearing program for residential driveway entrances.**

Contemplating a snow windrow clearing program required staff to identify and analyze many different factors that can impact the delivery and overall success potentially, of a new service level. The following aspects were considered:

#### **Level of Service**

The two (2) key factors in level of service are: 1) when the windrow clearing should occur based on the amount of snowfall, and 2) how long should the cleanup take after the snowfall has occurred. This is a critical aspect of any program and has direct implications on program costs. The highest costing program would have a level of service that is based on minimal snowfall accumulation as a trigger, and the shortest duration to clean the windrow after the event. The municipalities surveyed use a trigger point of five (5) centimetres and this seems to be the standard for dispatching equipment to clear windrows (after the roadways have been plowed, a second plow truck will respond to the participating addresses to clear the windrow).

#### **Application Process**

In considering a windrow program for qualified residents, it will be necessary to follow a similar process that other municipalities have utilized to determine the citizens eligibility for the program:

- All occupants of a household must be over 65 years of age and no other able-bodied occupants residing at the subject property.
- Applicants are required to attach a copy of their birth certificate, senior citizen card, driver's license, or passport.
- Proof of physical limitations is provided to ensure legitimate program use, through the provision of a provincial disability permit or medical note.
- Program registration by a fixed date (October 1) to allow staff time to plan routes.
- Applicants required sign off on a waiver of liability with respect to the program.

In addition, a medical condition may only be a temporary concern and after a period, a person may regain their full capacity. To have confidence that only those residents who require assistance are receiving it, there is a need for a robust application process with a sound eligibility criterion for one to qualify, followed by an annual application to ensure service is provided to qualified individuals. Staff have concerns related to collecting medical information.

The program will require staff to vet/approve applications and depending on volume, it may require administration not accounted for in current staffing levels.

### Snow Storage/Clearing

Each residential property is unique in its design and has varying ability to accommodate snow piles. The severity of the winter and number of times the windrow equipment is dispatched could result in the creation of large snow piles at the bottom of residential driveways which can reduce driveway widths if adequate snow storage space is not available. Storage area is particularly limited in newer communities where narrow lots reduce available space. During heavy snow events, more than 15cm+, the plow blade becomes less effective resulting in spillage.

Actual windrow clearing is not necessarily as effective as may be expected by the residents. Only 80% of the driveway width may be cleared to accommodate a single car width and some snow will remain in the driveway due to the nature of the equipment and variations in grade and slope between the road and the driveway. As a result, municipalities only commit to clearing one (1) car width up to 3m.

### Blocked Driveways

Driveways can be blocked by cars parked on the street preventing clearing activities. In these cases, the driveway is not cleared and is not serviced by the municipalities at a later date.

### In-eligible Driveway Locations

Driveways located on regional roads, commercial, industrial, institutional, high-rise properties, private roads, roads undergoing development and rear lanes would not be included in the program.

### Garbage and Recycling Collection Impacts

It is inevitable that there will be conflict between the garbage and recycling contractor and the windrow clearing depending on the day of the weather event. For instance, if containers are placed on the driveway entrance, windrow clearing may not be possible. Alternatively, if containers are placed too far up the driveway, considerable additional time will be required to retrieve and return the containers. This could result in a potential contract dispute with the collection provider and perhaps additional costs to the municipality.

As a result, some municipalities have chosen not to clear windrows on garbage/recycling collection days and clear windrows the following day.

### Property Damage

Damage to curbs, driveways, sod, lawn sprinkler heads or personal property installed in the road right of way would increase, resulting in higher damage repair costs.

### Customer Inquiries/Complaints

There is a noted expectation the Town will receive increased resident inquiries related to application process, eligibility, etc. Complaints are also highly anticipated related to timing of clearing, snow storage, sidewalk plow windrows, how much snow is removed from the driveway (edge to edge/bare pavement) and perceived quality of the snow removal.

These inquiries/complaints will continue to be received by the Town's Customer Service team and will need to be reviewed and validated based on approved service levels. All municipalities experience inquiries/complaints related to the program, all of which put increased strain on the call centre, requiring additional support depending on size of program.

**Potential program delivery options can assist residents with windrow snow removal.**

Seniors face significant mobility challenges during the winter months due to snow accumulation, which can create hazardous conditions and increase the risk of falls. If the Town undertook a windrow snow clearing program it would aim to reduce these risks and to improve the safety, mobility, and well-being of seniors during the winter months and could be achieved through different delivery methods:

Option 1 - Status quo: No changes to the current level of service and no addition of a new windrow removal program for seniors or persons with disabilities.

Option 2 - Financial Assistance Program: Provide a snow removal financial assistance program for seniors and persons with disabilities to aid in the costs incurred from hiring a service provider to remove snow from driveways. The City of Brampton provides qualified applicants to the program up to \$300 for properties. This would require proof of expense for the snow clearing service at end of season by resident to receive grant funding.

Option 3 – Windrow Removal with Application Fee: This would include charging an application fee of \$100 to each household to subsidize the windrow service program. Option 3 would offset funding for Option 4 or 5.

Option 4 - Windrow Removal (Contracted Service): This option would provide snow removal to all eligible households through the Town's current road plowing contractor.

Option 5 – Windrow Removal (In-House Staff): This option considers delivering the snow removal to all eligible households by Town forces as an inhouse service with existing equipment and additional seasonally employed staff (no capacity with existing staff). This would also allow for the sharing of staff resources (during times staff are not engaged in windrow plowing efforts) to assist in other existing operational-related services that continue to be impacted by growth and changing service levels.

For instance, Parks staff assumed the cul-de-sac clean up a few years ago and while it has resulted in an improved service level for residents in those areas, it has strained resources and had an impact on other services (forestry/ice rink maintenance). As the Town's tree canopy cover increases, and urban forestry matures it is becoming clear that current staff levels are not able to keep up with the required pruning cycles as per our Service Level Standards. This has a direct impact on the health of the tree canopy, road/sidewalk clearance, residential properties, and other infrastructure. Ice rinks construction and maintenance has also changed due to climate and the COVID



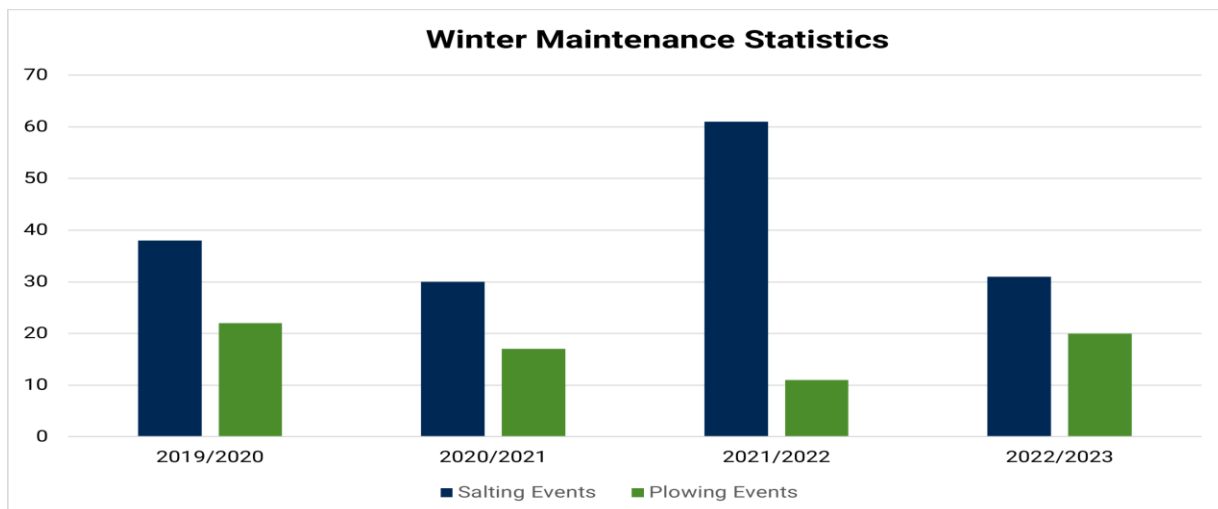
pandemic. During the pandemic, the Town switched to rink kits with boards as the consistent snow cover has been diminishing to enable construction of rinks traditionally. These rinks, while better for the ice longevity, require increased maintenance. Traditional rinks only required one (1) staff member and a plow truck to clear. The new rinks require four (4) staff to complete the clearing with small equipment to make the rinks available for the public in the same amount of time as traditional rink maintenance. Further information will be provided in the Winter Rink Update report at an October General Committee meeting.

If Council were to recommend proceeding with a program as outlined in Options 2-5, staff would advise on piloting the program and reporting back after the 2023-2024 season to determine if the program should be implemented fulltime as a permanent level of service.

**Many unknown aspects make it difficult to predict the costs of implementing a windrow program.**

It is currently difficult to provide accurate costing information for a windrow clearing program, of any scale, due to the lack of information on the number of participants and the fact that the work is subject to market conditions. In addition, the more frequent and severe the winter weather conditions, the greater the cost of implementing and maintaining this windrow program. This past winter season staff responded and plowed the roads on 20 separate winter events. Some of these winter events were prolonged snow events requiring staff to plow the roads for three (3) days (during same event) to ensure the roads were safe to travel, which potentially could mean dispatching windrow equipment to clear driveways each day.

Table 3: Winter Maintenance Statistics 2019-2023



Based on the previously presented options, staff have prepared a table illustrating the potential costs to implement the pilot program for the 2023-2024 winter season. This table estimates the number of snow events as 20 and a potential uptake of 500 households. Also, the contracted service estimate is based on pricing obtained from our current road plowing contractor.

Table 4: Estimated Funding Requirements

Potential Options	Estimated Funding for 2023/24 Winter (500 Driveways)
Option 1: Status Quo – no program	\$0
Option 2: Financial Assistance Program (\$300/eligible household)	\$150,000 (\$300/driveway)
Option 3: Windrow Removal with Application Fee	\$50,000 revenue  If Option 4 or 5 are endorsed as a windrow program model, revenue generated by charging an application fee could offset funding of the program in either option.
Option 4: Windrow Removal (Contracted Service):	\$250,000 (\$500/driveway)  Estimate obtained by current road plowing contractor, should this option be approved, it would be necessary to negotiate firm pricing/terms with current contractor as it would not be feasible to prepare an RFP and award for 2023-2024 winter season implementation.
Option 5: Windrow Removal (In-House, includes salaries and on call pay for four (4) staff)	\$200,000 *(\$90/driveway)  *Staff estimate it to cost approximately \$45,000 to deliver the service, which is proportionate to estimated hours spent engaged in windrow clearing, fuel and equipment maintenance. Remainder of funding to be spent on supporting other operational service levels as described previously.

**Town's potential windrow clearing program would follow a similar delivery model to other York Region Municipalities.**

Provided are the details of the delivery model should the Windrow Removal Pilot be endorsed, of which the main points are summarized here:

### Service Levels Standard

- Clearing snow from the end of residential driveways for one (1) car width only (approximately 2.5 - 3m), storing it within the boulevard and/or appropriate location on site. Snow is not cleared from the sidewalk windrow, residential pathways, driveways or removed from the property as part of this program.
- After a minimum 8 cm snowfall event .
- The driveway windrow clearing equipment will be dispatched within 12 hours after road plows have been engaged.
- The driveway windrow removal service does not include the clearing of the snow from the private walkways to a residence, the driveway, or the snow windrow left by the sidewalk plow.

### Eligibility

1. Be 65 years of age – All occupants of the household must be over 65 years of age. All new applicants must provide one of the following types of identification for all occupants residing at the address: Driver's License, Health Card, Birth Certificate or Passport.
2. Under 65 Years of Age and all occupants of the address over the age of 12 are physically unable to remove snow. To qualify, applicants must provide a provincial disability permit, note from a doctor (on doctor letterhead) or provide a Functional Abilities Form signed by a doctor, for each resident under 65 years of age.
3. Sign a liability waiver.

### Timeframe

The pilot program will begin on December 1, 2023, and run through till April 1, 2024. Staff will report back to Council in Q3 of 2024 providing information on the success of the program, challenges, funding requirements, customer satisfaction, etc., for consideration and potential permanent implementation of the new service level.

### Application Timing and Location

Applications will be accepted between October 15 – November 30, 2023.

Due to the requirement for applicants to provide proof of eligibility, applications will only be received in person at Access Aurora desk at Town Hall or the Joint Operations Centre.

### Evaluation of Program Results

Staff will evaluate the performance of the program based on staff experiences with administration and complaint resolution, cost of program based of volume and over all customer satisfaction over the 2023-2024 winter maintenance season. The results will be utilized to determine future expansion of the program and service delivery could be modified based on operational requirements and public feedback.

### Advisory Committee Review

Not applicable.

### Legal Considerations

Implementation of a windrow clearing program could lead to additional liability and claims being made against the Town in relation to property damage or personal injury, which may have an impact on the Town's insurance premiums. If a Windrow Clearing Program is implemented, steps should be taken to mitigate the risks by adding waivers of liability to the application process and ensuring that program is delivered as intended. It will also be important to clearly outline program parameters and limitations, and to set realistic expectations with respect to service level that is intended to be delivered.

### Financial Implications

All of the above identified windrow removal service enhancement option net operating costs would represent an incremental pressure on the Town's tax levy. Should Council approve the recommended or an alternative option, the associated net operating cost over the pilot period will be funded from the Town's tax rate stabilization reserve. Should the selected service enhancement be approved on an ongoing basis, its net operating costs will be phased onto the tax levy over a yet to be determined period of time.

### Communications Considerations

The Town will inform the public about the information contained in this report by posting it to the Town's website. Depending on Council's decision, the Communications Division will inform the public about the availability of a windrow removal program, or financial assistance program, through normal communications channels.

## Climate Change Considerations

The key opportunity in developing the Green Fleet Plan in 2021 was to achieve long-term GHG emissions targets, in conjunction with fundamental goals developed and the associated action items.

The following actions from GFP play a role in climate change mitigation:

- Replace vehicles with best in-class fuel efficient vehicles. New models are more fuel efficient, produce lower emissions and are good options while the manufacturers develop viable hybrid/electric vehicles required to provide service. Overall, GHG reduction, by upgrading alone, through capital renewal can produce 4-5 percent decrease.
- Utilize telematic information provided through GPS system to reduce idling, driver behaviour, maximize route efficiency, smart drivers can help reduce fuel use.

## Link to Strategic Plan

The development of a potential windrow program supports the Strategic Plan goal of Strengthening the Fabric of our Community through its accomplishment in developing a plan to review and realign service levels to reflect current and future demographic trends.

## Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

1. Council provide further direction.

## Conclusions

Several municipalities currently offer this service and, in most cases, include the program costs within the winter maintenance operating budget.

Overall, a snow windrow clearing program is an investment in the health and well-being of the senior's population and residents with disabilities and would provide an enhanced level of service for these residents.

Should Council choose to proceed with a windrow clearing program, staff recommend that Option 5 be considered. This option provides for greater control of the program and allows for existing service support and enhancement. The redirected staff resources will benefit the community in areas where service levels are not being currently met as

per our Service Level Standards, providing for more resource flexibility, utilization and management within the department.

## **Attachments**

None.

## **Previous Reports**

PW08-027, Investigation of a Snow Windrow Clearing Program for Seniors and Physically Challenged Residents, June 17, 2008

PW08-041, Implementation of a Snow Windrow Clearing Program for Seniors and Physically Challenged Residents, October 21, 2008

PW08-047, Implementation of a Snow Windrow Clearing Program for Seniors and Physically Challenged Residents, November 18, 2008

PW09-023, Update on Winter Windrow Clearing Program, May 5, 2009

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on August 31, 2023

## **Approvals**

**Approved by Sara Tienkamp, Director, Operational Services**

**Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer**