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Town of Aurora

Committee of the Whole Report

No. OPS24-020

Subject: Windrow Program Eligibility Criteria

Prepared by: Luigi Colangelo, Manager of Public Works

Department: Operational Services

Date: September 3, 2024

Recommendation

1. That Report No. OPS24-020 be received; and
2. That the eligibility criteria as described, be approved; and
3. That a cost-recovery amount of \$200 per participating household be approved; and
4. That adoption of the financial assistance criteria as proposed be approved.

Executive Summary

This report presents a summary of the recommended eligibility criteria for the 2024/2025 Windrow Removal Pilot Program (the Program), including options for cost recovery and amounts, processing and additional considerations regarding financial assistance models and income thresholds.

- The previously established eligibility criteria in 2024/2025 is expanded on from the 2023/2024 pilot program, including service standards and program delivery criteria.
- Benchmarking exercise reveals recommended \$200 per participant household.
- Considerations regarding financial assistance recommend using income thresholds and various income verification related information as criteria.

Background

The previously established eligibility criteria in 2024/2025 is expanded on from the 2023/2024 pilot program, including service standards and program delivery criteria.

During a snow event, windrow clearing vehicles will be dispatched only after a minimum eight centimetres snowfall. Snow will be cleared from the end of residential driveways with a minimum of three metres (one car width) and will be stored within the boulevard or another 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. If The Town of Aurora (The Town) declares a significant weather event, windrow plows will be dispatched following the end of the significant weather event. 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.

The Program will include residential occupants aged 65 years of age or older, where all occupants of the household must be over 65 years of age and have no other able-bodied occupants residing at the subject property that are eligible for the program. You must show proof of age in the form of government issued ID (birth certificate, driver's license) if you are under 65 years of age and all occupants of the address over the age of 16 are unable to remove snow. All residents must be listed on the application and provide proof of ID if above the age 16 or provide a provincial disability permit or a note from a doctor (on doctor letterhead). All applicants will be required to sign a Waiver of Liability with respect to the program.

Analysis

Benchmarking exercise reveals recommended \$200 per participant household.

As discussed in the previous report (OPS24-016), in 2023/2024, the program delivery cost was \$253,000 based on a total of 1,100 participating households (\$230 per household). Based upon a \$200 per applicant user fee, the Town would generate up to a maximum of \$220,000 in cost recoveries based upon 1,100 participants. Using an estimated per household cost of \$230 (as per 2023/2024 program costs), and accounting for approximately 1,500 participating households, the 2024/2025 total program cost is estimated to be \$345,000. If up to 75 per cent of the assumed 1,500 participating households, pay \$200 (assuming 25 per cent of applicants may apply for financial assistance), the Town would recover approximately \$225,000 resulting in a total program estimated net delivery cost of \$120,000. Note, staff anticipate that the

addition of 400 driveways to the program could be accommodated with the same staffing compliment (hiring of six seasonal employees); however, would still be completed within the 24-hour service standard under a typical snow event.

Staff recommend a participation cap at 1,500 households, which would be a marginal increase from the 2023/2024 participation total to account for potential increased popularity in the program and have financial certainty.

Table 1 below demonstrates municipal benchmarking of cost-recovery fees charged.

Table 1 – Municipal benchmarking of cost-recovery fees charged and financial assistance.

Municipality	Program Fee	Financial Assistance	Additional Information
Town of East Gwillimbury	\$150**	Yes	Does not offer windrow program but provides financial compensation of \$150 to hire contractor.
City of Markham	No Fee	N/A	Program for seniors and physically disabled persons.
City of Mississauga	\$200	Yes	Program for seniors and physically disabled persons.
Town of Newmarket	-	-	Does not offer windrow program.
Town of Wasaga Beach	\$200**	Yes	Does not offer windrow program but provides financial compensation of \$200 to hire contractor.
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville	No Fee	N/A	Program for seniors and physically disabled.

** Represents where no service is directly offered, compensation only.

Considerations regarding financial assistance recommend using income thresholds and various income verification related information as criteria.

Municipalities who offer financial assistance programs use varying income thresholds and eligibility criteria, all of which require verification. After researching methods in which this information may be captured and assessed, there are two prevailing mechanisms which Council may choose to have applied to this program. The easiest

way to standardize and classify income levels, is to use the Statistics Canada low-income cut-offs before tax, (LICO-BT) based on the number of people in the household. For example, one person in household (\$24,347), two persons in household (\$29,632). Based on the number of household occupants, anyone that qualifies as low-income would be exempt from paying the \$200 fee.

To verify income, there are two differing models to consider. The most used method by other programs, is to request a tax return copy; however, this is not recommended by the Town's Finance Department due to sensitivity and accuracy in showing true represented income. The preferred and staff recommended option is to request approval letters or proof of enrollment in other income support programs, which use similar thresholds for household income. Examples of these income support programs include the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), Ontario Disabilities Support Program (ODSP), or Ontario Works (OW). Each of the above-mentioned programs have statements or form letters which can be requested. To alleviate administrative burden, staff are exploring a digital application and document submission webpage, with digital waiver signing online, which is common practice in other municipalities. The Town would still include an in-person application option to accommodate any needs.

It should be noted that data collection and retention considerations regarding submission and protection of documents and privacy should be of utmost importance. Legal, Finance and IT Division staff have provided comment on this proposal and ensure that all options will be considered in keeping data protected and confidential. IT and Legal Services, in coordination with Operational Services staff, are finalizing an online web submission form which will propose to retain sensitive data for only as long as staff need to review the applicability and follow-up, if necessary, with a manual deletion of data once the application has been closed. If applying in person, no documents will be copied or retained.

Applicants will be directed to include Photo ID for all residents within a household above aged 16 and include medical verification in an approved format, if between ages 16-65 and medically or mentally unable to perform snow removal.

Regarding cost-recovery and user payment for the program if endorsed by Council, staff are exploring utilization of an online payment system through the web form software currently procured by the Town to use online credit card payments. An alternative in-person option will still be available to applicants, performed by customer service at Town Hall or the Joint Operations Centre.

Advisory Committee Review

None.

Legal Considerations

Continued implementation of the Program could lead to additional 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 and the Town's insurance related budget lines. Waivers of liability should continue to be mandatory as part of the application process to limit claims and potential damages.

Lastly, the Town must comply with all requirements as set out in the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and its regulations with respect to the retention and disposal of personal information.

Financial Implications

Staff estimate that the 2024/2025 Program's gross operating costs will remain relatively unchanged on a per household basis to that of the 2023/2024 Program at \$230 per household.

If the recommended user fee of \$200 per household is approved, the Town's estimated average net operating cost per household for this program would become \$80, assuming that 25 per cent of program participants apply for financial assistance. Based upon the above assumptions, should the maximum recommended 1,500 participants enroll in the program, the total net operating cost is estimated to be \$120,000. As previously approved, this program's net delivery cost is to be fully funded through a contribution from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve.

Communications Considerations

Communications will inform the public about the information contained in this report by posting it to the Town's website. If the eligibility criteria are approved, Communications will inform the public about the criteria during the promotion campaign of the Program starting in the fall and including tactics such as website, media release, newsletters, social media, pylon signs, digital and print ads, post cards etc.

Climate Change Considerations

The recommendations have a minor impact on greenhouse gas emissions; however, when staff review future windrow clearings, green procurement will be considered as it plays an important roll mitigating the impacts of a changing climate, from air quality, stormwater management to counteracting the effects of the heat island.

Link to Strategic Plan

The development of the 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 proposes an alternative amount for cost-recovery per applicant.
2. Council proposes an alternative method for eligibility criteria.
3. Council does not approve the income verification process as proposed.
4. Other options as directed by Council.

Conclusions

In reviewing the existing models of the Program's amongst municipalities in Ontario, it is determined that program eligibility criteria previously set for the 2023/2024 pilot remains aligned. To offset program costs, and to retain best value-added return on investment, staff recommend a \$200 user fee to offset the cost of hiring six seasonal employees as proposed in previous recommendations (Report OPS24-016). To ensure residents of Aurora that are considered to be low-income have an opportunity to utilize this program, staff recommend using the Statistics Canada income thresholds (LICO-BT) for a fee exemption and will prioritize that data collection is protected and confidential through the review and submission processes proposed above.

Attachments

None.

Previous Reports

OPS24-016, Windrows Pilot Program Extension-Service Delivery Options, July 2, 2024

OPS24-007, Windrow Pilot Project – Additional Information, April 23, 2024

OPS24-004, Windrow Pilot Project-Update, April 2, 2024

OPS23-020, Potential Snow Windrow Removal Assistance Pilot Project, September 19, 2023

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on August 14, 2024.

Approvals

Approved by Sara Tienkamp, Director, Operational Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer