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Town of Aurora
Committee of the Whole Report
No. OPS26-011

Subject: 2025-2026 Windrow Removal Pilot Program End of Season Update

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Department: Operational Services

Date: April 14, 2026

Recommendation

1. That Report No. OPS26-011 be received; and
2. That the Windrow Removal Pilot Program be discontinued.

Executive Summary

The 2025–2026 winter season marked the third year of Aurora’s Windrow Removal Pilot Program (the Pilot Program). This report presents an evaluation of program delivery, costs, weather conditions, operational challenges, and participant feedback from the most recent season. Despite implementing service optimizations to improve response times, the program continued to experience significant limitations related to equipment capability, snow storage capacity, and service consistency, particularly during periods of heavy snowfall. Staff recommend that the Pilot Program be discontinued. Staff further recommend that Council consider alternative service delivery models, such as targeted reimbursement or a grant program, to better support eligible residents while reducing operational risk and long-term cost exposure.

- Between December 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the windrow removal program was deployed twelve times with a total of 196.5 cm of snowfall accumulation.
- A total of 276 participants enrolled in the 2025-2026 winter season of which 100 of the 276 received financial assistance resulting in a total of \$35,200 in program fees being collected.

- A program satisfaction questionnaire was distributed; 174 responses were received, of which over 71 per cent answered either “not satisfied at all” or “somewhat satisfied” with the program service level in 2025-2026.
- Staff introduced an optimized service response in 2025-2026 which achieved near instant deployment of windrow removal after full road plowing completion and represented the best-case scenario of program delivery response time.
- Similar staff challenges were faced as the previous winter season, including snow storage limitations, equipment limitations, and low customer satisfaction despite maximum delivery optimization.
- Aurora should reevaluate the future direction of its Windrow Removal Pilot Program.

Background

As directed by Council at its September 2025 meeting (Report OPS25-017), the Pilot Program was continued for the 2025-2026 season with a goal of providing a cost-neutral service, and an increased user fee of \$200. The program also included a financial assistance criterion, for eligible residents, which covered 100 per cent of the \$200 program fee.

Table 1: Windrow Removal Pilot Program Years 1-3

Year	Enrolment	Snow Removal Events	Total Snow Accum. (cm)	Total Incremental Salary Cost	Notes
2023-24	1,048	5	89 cm	\$131,680	Characterized as a mild winter with low precipitation.
2024-25	468	8	183 cm	\$91,155	Freeze thaw events and total precipitation represent a typical winter weather pattern.
2025-26	276	12	196.5 cm	\$37,882	Freeze thaw events coupled with high precipitation amounts early in the

Year	Enrolment	Snow Removal Events	Total Snow Accum. (cm)	Total Incremental Salary Cost	Notes
				(\$29,484 Seasonal salary + \$8,338 permanent staff utilized)	season, including significant precipitation in January, followed by below average in February and March.

Analysis

Between December 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the windrow removal program was deployed twelve times with a total 196.5 cm of snowfall accumulation.

The 2025-2026 winter program saw a total of 196.5 cm of snowfall accumulation between December 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026. As a result, the program was deployed to remove windrows during twelve events. Table 2 below details monthly snow events and the time to complete the service for all program participants.

Table 2: Windrow Plowing Events (December 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026)

Event date	Monthly Total Snow Accum. (cm)	Hours to Complete
December 2025: 3 events	42.5	18
January 2026: 7 events	94	30.5
February 2026: 1 event	43	5.5
March 2026: 1 event	17	8
Totals	196.5	54

The past snow removal season saw more than double the snow than in the initial pilot year, and an increase from 2024-2025 which was considered the high-end of the snow accumulation. Snow removal preparedness is not dissimilar to flood mitigation in terms of preparing for the “worst case scenario” and not the “most likely”. It is integral to assume that future winter seasons could result in similar or greater snowfall

accumulation; therefore, removal equipment and snow storage considerations should be assumed accordingly.

A total of 276 participants enrolled in the 2025-2026 winter season of which 100 of the 276 received financial assistance resulting in a total of \$35,200 in program fees being collected.

One seasonal hire was recruited and utilized for the 2025-2026 based on the total number of applications approved to participate in the program. This resulted in a net cost of \$29,484. Additional considerations around staff administration costs, including ongoing customer service, GIS integration, program advertisement, equipment maintenance or fuel, are not included into the total program costs because staff and resources used are cross-utilized amongst multiple Town services. For example, operational vehicles used for windrow removal, are also used for Town facility snow removal; therefore, due to the integrated nature of staff resources and other program costs used in the delivery of other Town services a line-by-line breakdown of costs specific to windrow removal cannot easily be accounted for.

With 176 paying residents, a total of \$35,200 was collected in program fees. A net cost of \$29,484 for one seasonal employee, calculating revenue versus accessory expenses, exceed the difference of \$5,716.

Permanent staff were utilized for windrow removals to create efficiency in service delivery; the cost is estimated at \$8,338. Additional costs, such as fuel, program advertisement, equipment maintenance, and staff administrative costs would also push the cost-neutrality beyond the \$35,200 revenue generated.

A total of 100 residents qualified for the financial assistance criteria, representing approximately 36 per cent of the program's participants, resulting in approximately \$20,000 in foregone revenues absorbed by the Town; however, this was generally aligned with our expectation of 30 per cent at the outset of the criteria establishment.

A program satisfaction questionnaire was distributed; 174 responses were received, of which over 71 per cent answered either "not satisfied at all" or "somewhat satisfied" with the program service level in 2025-2026.

The satisfaction survey distributed to all participants focused on evaluating the performance of the service, along with considerations around the fees associated with it, and future iterations of the program.

Of the 276 participants, 174 responses were received. The survey asked four questions and included a general comment section. Table 3 below illustrates survey questions and responses:

Table 3: Satisfaction Survey Results:

1. How satisfied were you with the level of service and timing of the windrow removal after a snow event.			
Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied		Not Satisfied At All
28 per cent	43 per cent		29 per cent
2. Did you find the program fee of \$200, to be:			
Too Costly	Fair	Great Value	Not Applicable
44 per cent	26 per cent	3 per cent	27 per cent
3. If the program was continued, would you participate next winter with the same enrolment \$200 cost and timing of service level?			
Yes		No	
43 per cent		57 per cent	
4. If the program was continued, and the service cost was reduced but the same timing of windrow removal continued as it was this year, would you participate next winter?			
Yes		No	
77 per cent		23 per cent	

This data shares a mixed response. The most telling is the question of participant satisfaction specific to the \$200 user fee which was implemented to deliver a relatively cost neutral program for the Town.

General survey comments indicate significant dissatisfaction, driven primarily by slow response times, incomplete clearing, and perceived poor value for cost. While the program is recognized as essential for seniors and residents with mobility limitations, program logistics resulted in the participants feeling the service did not meet their needs adequately.

Overall themes of general comments:

- Lengthy delays (12–24+ hours)
- Inconsistency or incomplete clearing due to inadequate equipment
- High-cost relative to performance
- Sidewalk plow interference (not part of windrow program service level)

It was also noted by respondents that the servicing time should have been optimized to less than four hours for a more on-demand service, which is not achievable under the current equipment set-up.

Staff introduced an optimized service response in 2025-2026 which achieved near instant deployment of windrow removal after full road plowing completion and represented the best-case scenario of program delivery response time.

Staff made service level adjustments in 2026, which aimed to deploy equipment removals only after all roads and subsequent clean-ups were finalized. The rationale was to mitigate the duplication of windrows after plows conducted second or third passes to achieve bare pavement. It was determined that awaiting full clean-up of roads was successful implementation. To achieve near immediate response for windrows, route optimization was applied to mimic road plow routes. This improved response time allowed for clearing to happen often within 4 or 5 hours of road plow route completion instead of the documented 12-hour estimate. It is important to note road plow route completion averaged 12.5 hours, in which windrow removal was then deployed.

Similar staff challenges were faced as the previous winter season, including snow storage limitations, equipment limitations, and low customer satisfaction despite maximum delivery optimization.

Similar equipment challenges were noted this past season as documented in Report No. OPS25-014 but were compounded by over 20 cm additional snow accumulation. Heavy snow piled on moderately sized boulevards which resulted in pick-up truck plow blades not being able to achieve the height required to pile snow high enough. Shared driveways with only one program participant also posed a challenge, as it meant one of the two property owners might see snow from the windrow removal of the adjoining property, and partially blocking their portion of the driveway.

It is important to note, with such accumulation, dedicated windrow snow removal tractors or loaders faced limitations with snow storage in 2025-2026. There is often not enough room for snow storage with this level of accumulation. While the Town

conducts snow removal (blowing snow into a 6-ton truck and removal from site) in places like the downtown core, this is not possible on residential driveways and boulevards due to resource capacity and risk. Various photographs below (Figures 1-2) demonstrate some of the challenges faced:

Figure 1: Windrow left after road plow, with limited snow storage for windrow removal plow, and inability to pile.



Figure 1 above, shows a driveway snowbank over 9 feet high. This photo was taken before windrow removal trucks could attempt to complete the service. The only resolution would be to push the snow as close to the extent of the driveway as possible, and with such volume of snow, it would be barely achievable to allow even one car width available. It should be noted, that while pick-up trucks which are currently utilized are limited in their ability to mitigate this windrow. Larger tractors with specialty attachments could face a similar challenge, as experienced by neighbouring municipalities (Vaughan/Richmond Hill) who have specialized windrow equipment.

Figure 2: Shared driveway windrow removal reverse truck.



Figure 2 shows a common scenario. Recognizing the limitations of snow storage, when a participant is in a semi or town house residential dwelling, with a shared driveway where snow storage is limited, the resident opposite the participating driveway is often left with snow from the opposite side, leaving them with an additional pile of snow, on top of what was already deposited from the road plow. This poses an even greater risk when infrastructure like utility boxes and light posts are nearby. In this situation, a Town truck is pictured having to come in from the side of the street opposite the flow of traffic, a dangerous and time-consuming method of removal.

Aurora should re-evaluate the future direction of its Windrow Removal Pilot Program.

Reiterating many of the challenges referenced below in previous years, and compounded by the results of the survey, the top complaint from participants is the timing of service, and ability to clean-up snow with existing equipment. As described, staff note that both concerns cannot be resolved without a significant capital infrastructure commitment, which is also not recommended.

Route optimization has been substantially improved to its maximum efficiency, and the only way to improve the “cleanliness” of snow clearing, and timing of service to support customer satisfaction (on demand service) would be to procure one tractor for each road plow route. This would be approximately eleven pieces of equipment, resulting in a capital investment of over \$3.3 million, not including routine equipment maintenance,

and cost of additional staff to operate equipment, and additional technicians to maintain this equipment.

It is therefore recommended to discontinue the Pilot Program until such time as direction is provided on the permanent status of the program.

While one additional windrow specialized attachment was included in the 2026 Capital Budget, staff have not yet initiated the procurement as it was determined that one machine would not significantly improve service levels. It is projected that in order to improve timing of delivery, a minimum of three or four machines would require procurement; however, since there is no operational need for this equipment during the summer months this is not recommended.

An alternative recommendation being considered, is the option of a grant or reimbursement program for applicable (seniors, disabled persons and low-income households). In this case property owners could then procure their own private hire snow removal contractor, to manage their respective windrow. This would result in a more on-demand type service for residents, who would manage their own service level. The threshold of reimbursement would require Council consideration.

Advisory Committee Review

None.

Legal Considerations

Windrow cleaning operations conducted with the Town's current equipment under normal winter conditions presents inherent risks to the Town. Continuation of the program in future years using the same methods may expose the Town to further potential liability and claims resulting from the Town's windrow clearing operations.

Financial Implications

Overall, the 2025-2026 Windrow Pilot Program concluded the season in a cost neutral position, resulting in a balancing transfer from the tax rate stabilization reserve not being necessary.

Communications Considerations

The Windrow Removal Pilot Program continued for the 2025–2026 winter season. To promote the program, Communications used a multi-channel approach that included social media, the Town website, pylon screens, newsletters, the Notice Board, and online articles.

Social media generated strong engagement and active discussion among residents. Between October 2, 2025 and March 5, 2026, promotion of the program resulted in:

- 28 social media posts
- 113,583 impressions (times content was viewed)
- 4,772 engagements (likes, comments, shares)
- 4.2 per cent average engagement rate (industry average: 2 per cent)
- 835 link clicks to the Town website

Public feedback on the program was mixed. Many residents raised concerns about the cost, particularly the fee increase had doubled for a service intended to support seniors and residents with disabilities. Others noted that some seniors may not qualify for financial assistance but still face financial constraints.

Additional comments suggested the service should be offered town-wide, while some residents reported delays or partial clearing of windrows. Residents also compared Aurora's program with those in other municipalities and suggested alternatives, such as plows with windrow-clearing attachments or deploying a second vehicle to clear windrows immediately after the main plow.

Despite these concerns, several residents acknowledged that the Town had clearly communicated the program's scope, including the one-car-width clearing limit, deployment criteria, and available financial assistance.

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 Windrow Pilot 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. The Town continue with the 2025-2026 model with the same \$200 fee and program parameters as a pilot for the 2026-2027 season.
2. Staff investigate a grant program which will provide monetary funding for residents who qualify (seniors, disabled persons and low-income households) and the contracted service would be solely resident directed.

Conclusions

Based on the 2025–2026 operational results, financial analysis, and participant feedback, staff conclude that the Pilot Program is not sustainable under the current service model. Despite achieving maximum operational optimization, persistent equipment limitations, snow storage constraints, and low customer satisfaction remain unresolved. Meaningful service improvements would require substantial capital investment that is not recommended. Accordingly, staff recommend discontinuing the Pilot Program and exploring alternative approaches that better align service outcomes, fiscal responsibility, and resident needs.

Attachments

None.

Previous Reports

OPS25-017, 2025-2026 Windrow Pilot Program Models, September 9, 2025

OPS25-014, 2024-2025 Windrow Program Pilot Year-End Report, June 10, 2025

OPS24-020, Windrow Program Eligibility Criteria, September 3, 2024

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 March 26, 2026

Approvals

Approved by Sara Tienkamp, Director, Operational Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer