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Town of Aurora
Council Report
No. OPS24-007

Subject: Windrow Pilot Project – Additional Information

Prepared by: Luigi Colangelo, Manager of Public Works

Department: Operational Services

Date: April 23, 2024

Recommendation

1. That Report No. OPS24-007 be received for information.

Executive Summary

The following report details additional information regarding the 2023/2024 Windrow Removal Pilot Program as requested by Council during the April 2, 2024 meeting of the Committee of the Whole.

- Seasonal staff time allocation and salary distribution.
- Public feedback received during windrow removal events.
- Additional program considerations for 2024/2025.

Background

As requested by Council during the Committee of the Whole meeting on April 2, 2024, the following information represents additional detail of seasonal staff time allocation and salary distribution, and includes feedback received from public during service events. As two additional windrow removal service events occurred after the report to Committee of the Whole was delivered, the total number events are five for 2023/2024 winter maintenance season.

Table 1: Windrow Plowing Events (Winter 2023/2024)

Event date	Seasonal Staff Utilized	Hours to Complete
December 7, 2023	6 seasonal staff	5 hours

January 13, 2024	6 seasonal staff	7 hours
February 16, 2024	6 seasonal staff	5 hours
March 21, 2024	6 seasonal staff	5 hours
March 23, 2024	6 seasonal staff	4 hours
	Total Hours	26 Hours

Seasonal staff time allocation and salary distribution.

Specific to seasonal staff time allocation and salary distribution, the following table represents additional information breaking down salary:

Table 2: Seasonal staff salary distribution

Seasonal Staff	Hourly Wage	Regular wage Windrow (26 hrs x hourly rate)	Overtime and Standby Pay	Total Windrow Related Earnings	Total Gross Salary	% of Windrow Removal toward Gross Salary
Seasonal 1	\$27.68/ hr	\$719.68	\$2,866.00	\$3,585.68	\$24,504.17	14.6%
Seasonal 2	\$27.68/ hr	\$719.68	\$2,830.00	\$3,549.68	\$24,198.43	14.6%
Seasonal 3	\$27.68/ hr	\$719.68	\$3,012.00	\$3,731.68	\$23,592.06	15.8%
Seasonal 4	\$27.68/ hr	\$719.68	\$2,900.00	\$3,619.68	\$22,988.44	15.7%
Seasonal 5	\$27.68/ hr	\$719.68	\$2,224.00	\$2,943.68	\$19,093.05	15.4%
Seasonal 6	\$27.68/ hr	\$719.68	\$2,020.00	\$2,739.68	\$17,304.33	15.8%
			Total All Seasonals	\$20,170	\$131,680	15.3%

Note: Gross Pay includes statutory holiday pay, and vacation pay. No taxes shown.

As noted above in Table 2, 15.3 per cent of the total salary paid to the six seasonal hires was directly related to performing windrow removals or being paid on standby to complete windrow removal services.

On average, 84 per cent of assigned work tasks included supplementary work supporting block pruning and municipal tree maintenance, outdoor rink set up and ongoing maintenance, park infrastructure repair and maintenance, special event set up and takedown, and other duties in preparation of the summer outdoor maintenance season such as picnic table and waste receptacle restoration.

Of the six seasonals hires, two were assigned to assist the forestry crew on municipal tree maintenance and block pruning. This covered the 84 per cent of salary paid for assigned work tasks outside of windrow removal events. During this time, the forestry crew was able to accomplish clearing a backlog of 35 streets, totalling 2,372 municipal trees pruned.

Of the four additional seasonal staff, 85 per cent of assigned task and associated salary was split between the following duties:

- outdoor natural rink set up and maintenance (20 per cent)
- summer outdoor infrastructure maintenance, such as picnic table, benching, and garbage receptacle repair and refresh (25 per cent)
- park infrastructure repair and maintenance, including customer service-related responses (25 per cent)
- outdoor event related set up and takedown assistance, including Santa Clause Parade floats, Christmas Market huts, and others (15 per cent)

It is important to note, that during a more typical winter maintenance season, the number of windrow removal events may have been closer to ten to fifteen occurrences. This would potentially double total hourly salary and total overtime earnings, resulting in a per centage of salary conducting windrows closer to 40 to 50 per cent of gross paid earnings.

Public feedback received during windrow removal events.

Staff considered methods of collecting feedback with a participant satisfaction survey but most applicants did not include an e-mail address for a digital follow up; additionally, phone call questionnaires while contemplated are a costly exercise in terms of administrative use of staff time. As such, Town Communications staff provided the following social media statistics and sentiment from October 10, 2023 to March 31, 2024:

- 29 published posts on the topic of windrows
- 131,567 impressions (people who saw the content)

- 8,067 engagements (people to interacted with, commented on or liked the content)
- Over 250 comments, overwhelmingly positive or neutral
- 6.1 per cent engagement rate on average (2 per cent is the industry average)
- 1,177 link clicks through to the website

The following note was received from Town Communications staff in summary of the windrow program received feedback:

“Winter weather typically brings an onslaught of negative comments on the Town’s social media posts but the comments on our windrow posts were overwhelmingly positive. It is also rare for residents to give kudos to the Town on social media but the comments on our windrow posts did just that.”

As noted in the last report, of the 1,100 participants, on average we received ten complaints per event. This represents less than one per cent of participants suggesting they were unhappy with the service delivery. Of the less than one per cent, many comments inquired about service delivery time, forwarded to operations staff prior to the service being completed. On average the service delivery took 4.5 hours to complete utilizing six seasonal staff and three additional full-time staff, with the exception of the significant snow event which was completed in under seven hours despite the service delivery standard becoming null and void.

Additional program considerations for 2024/2025.

Staff recommend continuing with the pilot project for the 2024/2025 winter maintenance season to better gauge the financial impact of a historically “normal” snowfall season, which is predicted to be ten to fifteen major snowfall events.

An option to consider offsetting program costs, is a user-pay model, which has most recently been implemented by City of Burlington at \$100 per residential dwelling. In 2023/2024, the cost to deliver the program in Aurora per address was approximately \$227.

In East Gwillimbury (EG), the Town ran a snow removal financial assistance pilot program in 2023/2024, where eligible seniors and residents with disabilities are provided with a \$150 grant, to secure their own contractor. In EG, at the end of the season residents are required to show proof of retained services, to be reimbursed \$150. This is a viable option if Council seeks to reduce program costs and have a hard cost cap. In Aurora, if 1,100 program participants were given \$150 per residential

address, it would cost the Town \$165,000. This program delivery format would result in increased administrative workload for the Town which would be absorbed within its existing funding levels.

Another goal of the pilot program sought to determine the amount of time it would take to clear all participant addresses, factoring the number of utilized staff and allocated addresses per route. Given the service standard per event averaging 4.5 hours, which is amongst one of the most efficient average times of completion amongst our neighbouring municipalities who currently have a windrow program, Council may elect to reduce the number of seasonal hires to five staff in 2024/2025, which would likely increase the service standard of completion to six hours.

Advisory Committee Review

None.

Legal Considerations

None.

Financial Implications

The 2023/2024 windrow pilot program costs of \$253,000 were fully funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve.

The total estimated cost for the 2024/2025 windrow pilot program is anticipated to remain comparable to the 2023/2024 pilot at \$253,000, with \$84,300 and \$168,700 of this cost falling under the 2024 and 2025 operating budgets, respectively. If this pilot's extension for the upcoming winter season is approved, it is recommended that the program's costs continue to be funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve.

Should Council select a user-pay option to partially recover the costs of this pilot program, or a grant format, the required funding from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve would be adjusted accordingly to ensure its costs are fully funded for the winter season.

Further, should this pilot be extended, the Town's 2024 and 2025 operating budgets would be amended accordingly.

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 pilot program, and application requirements similar to the 2023/2024 pilot.

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 Pilot 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 may choose to incorporate a pilot user-pay model, or grant program for the upcoming winter maintenance season.
2. Council may choose to request staff obtain a quote for services to hire a provider to perform the program on behalf of the Town for the upcoming winter maintenance season.
3. Council may choose to endorse the implementation of the windrow program fulltime for seniors or individuals with disabilities, under one of these models.
4. Council to provide direction.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is the recommendation of staff to repeat the pilot program as designed for the upcoming winter maintenance season. If Council sees fit, the addition of a user-

pay model would supplement costs; however, if more snow events occur, the cost of the program would increase, and therefore the per cent of subsidy would be affected.

Attachments

None.

Previous Reports

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

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

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on April 18, 2024

Approvals

Approved by Sara Tienkamp, Director, Operational Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer