

Potential funding models in September will determine future of windrow removal

The future of Aurora's windrow removal program will be determined in September pending new funding models coming forward to Council.

Lawmakers last week received a report on the 2024-2025 Windrow Removal Pilot Program, in which staff identified several concerns about the ongoing viability of the program. Questions were raised over the ongoing cost of delivering the program to eligible residents, how much applicants might need to pay, and costs to secure plowing equipment to make the program more efficient.

While staff recommended the Town scrap the program altogether, Council members were unwilling to call it a day just yet, giving staff and themselves more time to explore different funding models, including raising the costs for eligible residents to subscribe to the program, or even stipends to eligible residents helping them to secure private snow removal services.

The second year of the pilot, delivered by the Operational Services Department, was a more accurate reflection of typical winter conditions, with eight deployments and a total snowfall accumulation of 188 centimetres, more than double the previous year, said the Town in a statement following last week's meeting. The program faced several operational challenges due to the increased snowfall and limitations of the equipment used.

While Council voted to look at different models, last year's pilot program received a thumbs-down from resident Jordan Drodge who said he agreed with staff concerns that the program is not effective and putting the Town at risk of potential liability and claims but said there was definite room for improvement.

I would like to speak more to the importance of making this program work, he said. The staff who attempted to implement this service should be commended for their efforts, despite the initial pilot being doomed to failure due to inadequate resources and misaligned expectations from the program's participants.

As stated in [the staff report] the spirit of the service that the Town attempted to provide was not in line with residents' expectations. It should be made clear to program participants that the Town's Windrow Clearing Service is not intended to meet the service level of perfection that one might expect with private snow clearing services, but to provide emergency access and ease the burden on our emergency personnel when they are responding to residents' distress calls.

Drawing a personal connection to the program, he said amid the heavy February snows earlier this year, he twisted his ankle in his driveway and was unable to get up.

By the time the paramedics arrived and we were on our way to the hospital, nearly a full hour had passed in what could be described as the best-case scenario for these conditions at the time, he continued. Had the driveway not been cleared, it would have been much more stressful on the first responders and taken additional time to get me to the ambulance, time that could make the difference between life and death for someone else in need of their services.

With our aging population of seniors, those with disabilities, and the increasingly poor cardiovascular health amongst all age groups, the strain on emergency services responding to cardiac and other injury events is only going to increase. This puts not only the residents, but the responders themselves at increased risk of injury and burnout. This problem is expected to become so prevalent that I have taken pre-emptive steps to ensure at least one automated external defibrillator is publicly available within my neighbourhood.

I strongly believe that with some guidance and proper allocation of resources, through mutual assistance, this windrow removal program can provide a type of combined insurance to achieve its intended result and not only reduce the risks to residents most in need of this service, but to our first responders as well who work so very hard to ensure the safety and well-being of us all.

By Brock Weir