

Some seniors struggling with costs of incoming windrow removal program, says Councillor

As the deadline to apply for windrow removal for the 2024-2025 winter season approaches this Friday, November 1, some seniors on fixed incomes are struggling to fit the cost into their budgets, according to Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

The Councillor raised concerns at last week's Council meeting as the Town prepares to close the application process.

The windrow removal program, which clears that pesky bank of snow that forms at the ends of driveways after snow plows clear the roads, was implemented last year as a free pilot program for eligible households – that is, for seniors and residents experiencing mobility challenges who don't have anyone else in their homes who are able to shovel. But, as the pilot comes into its second year, there is now a \$100 non-refundable fee per household.

While fee exemptions are built into the program depending on income levels, Councillor Gilliland said some seniors who need assistance don't meet the eligibility criteria.

“Some seniors reached out to me who felt their fixed income did not meet the requirements for the winter clearing subsidized programs we have,” said the Councillor. “One of the suggestions [they made] was facilitating a payment plan to help them pay for this service.”

Town Treasurer Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel said given the amount of the payment, “it would create a significant amount of administrative burden” to spread the \$100 fee over four separate payments.

“We're also getting into the season, so it may get a little challenging if someone stops paying and does not make those installments,” said Wainwright-van Kessel. “Do we stop clearing the windrows? That is why we're looking at it as a lump sum. There are opportunities for those who are on fixed incomes and those lower income brackets to be able to provide some supplemental information to qualify for a reduction in fees as well.”

The Councillor went on to suggest that this issue could be ironed out “down the road.”

“We need to take it away and look at it, but we also have to look at the amount of additional work to see if there is a way to automate the process in any way, if we're going to go ahead with that,” replied the Treasurer.

This season's Windrow Pilot Program is set to run between December 1, 2024 and April 1, 2025.

Eligibility is residents 65 and older where households “have no other able-bodied occupants residing at the subject property.” Proof of age must be provided to the Town. The initiative is also open to some residents under the age threshold who can provide a provincial disability permit or a doctor's note.

“The service is triggered by at least eight centimetres of snowfall. A minimum of three metres of snow will be cleared from the end of your residential driveways,” says the Town. “Snow is stored on the boulevard or appropriate location on site, but sidewalks, pathways and driveways are not cleared as part of this program.”

“Delays may occur due to weather, so frequent travellers should arrange alternate snow removal. If Aurora declares a significant weather event, windrow plows will be dispatched following the end of the significant weather event. The program excludes driveways on regional roads, commercial, industrial, institutional, high-rise properties, private roads, roads undergoing development and rear lanes.”

For more information, including applications, visit aurora.ca/windrow.

By Brock Weir