

Windrow clearing pilot will continue with increased user cost, subsidies

Aurora's windrow removal pilot program will continue into this coming winter with an increased price per household, and subsidies to help others make ends meet.

Council last week formally gave the green light to extend the pilot program another year, helping seniors and those living with disabilities to clear the ends of their driveways of pesky banks of snow left by passing street snowplows.

The upcoming winter season will see the program made available to local seniors aged 65+ at a cost of \$200 per household, with subsidies available to residents living with disabilities and seniors in the same age bracket who fall under the low-income threshold as set by the Federal government.

The decision came after recent talks which explored the possibility of providing reimbursements to qualified residents who might book a private windrow-clearing/plowing service, raising costs to ensure the program is cost-neutral for taxpayers, and even doing away with the pilot altogether.

Sara Tienkamp, Aurora's Director of Operations, told Council that with current staffing levels and with the recommendations before Council, there would be no impact to the budget.

"I can perform that duty under [the Operating Budget] with minimal impact," she said. "There might be some increased fuel, some maintenance on some vehicles, but all the other costs for staffing are already accommodated and we can fit that within the current service level that we provide. If you're considering including individuals over 65 at a \$200 rate, that would cover the complete cost of hiring additional staff. Assuming that we would be over that \$200 threshold that we're recommending we would need, then we would need an additional body. Those costs would be totally covered and it would be cost-neutral then."

As the demand for windrow removal went down over the last winter season after Council attached a \$100 fee with a 50 per cent decrease in uptake, she said this further fee hike, she added, could result in a further reduction of applicants.

"Last year we had around 275 applicants and that was inclusive of the ones that were subsidized by the Town that were low-income," she said.

While the program passed unanimously on a vote of 6-0 with Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner absent from last week's meeting, some lawmakers still had reservations on whether the price increase was the right way forward.

"Low-income thresholds usually identify the poverty line, and I think we're not just talking about poverty here - what we're talking about is the ability to pay," said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese. "I think many of the low-income thresholds, no matter which one you use, are really quite low. I think it might not capture some of the people that really need it to people that are greater than [an individual income of] \$21,000."

"I am just concerned that it is going to be too difficult for some of the people to enter this program even though they're at low income, but a little higher income than those thresholds."

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland also had concerns over the costs and requested a status update as the program rolls out to ensure its meeting the mark.

"I think it's important that staff do a report back in Q2 2026 with the results of this program to monitor its progress and offer any recommendations to improve the service or budget model," she said. "As we've seen, we've had variations in different winters and I think this is something that would be beneficial."

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