

Windrow removal pilot could continue into winter of 2026 ? 2027

Aurora's windrow removal pilot project could resume in the winter ahead as Council continues to look for the right formula to make it work.

The pilot project, which just completed its third winter, was put in place by Council to give seniors and residents living with mobility challenges, the opportunity to have the ridge of snow left on the ends of driveways by passing snow plows removed for a nominal fee.

It's a program that's been beset with issues at the outset, including concerns related to cost and customer satisfaction, and municipal staff last week once again recommended it be discontinued.

But Council was not prepared to ditch the pilot altogether.

Instead, in an issue that will be up for final consideration at the April 28 Council meeting, members voted continue with the program into the 2026 ? 2027 season with a \$200 fee per eligible household.

?I'm not supportive of discontinuing the program, especially at this point,? said Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. ?What this report is showing me is not that the service isn't needed; it's that the current model isn't exactly working in the way we intended. I think there's clearly a need in the community for this type of service and the residents who physically can't manage their windrows on their own, that doesn't disappear, and we really need to ensure that we're tackling this in a way that makes sense.?

The staff report noted the windrow removal program was deployed 12 times over the course of the 2025-2026 season, with 276 participants enrolled in the program.

In a survey of 174 survey respondents, 71 per cent said they were either ?not satisfied at all? or ?somewhat satisfied? with the service level.

The report states similar staff challenges were faced as in the previous season ?including snow storage limitations, equipment limitations, and low customer satisfaction, despite maximum delivery optimization.?

In putting forward the ?Status Quo? alternative to staff's recommendations, Councillor Gilliland said she was buoyed by the investments made in the 2026 Budget to improve snow removal equipment and, thereby, the delivery.

?I know that we are at the end of the term and this service does directly impact vulnerable residents at this time in future budgets, so my position is to refine it, don't remove it. Let's allow the next Council to tackle this and determine the long-term forward path.?

Councillor Wendy Gaertner's support also noted the impact a cancellation would have on vulnerable residents.

?This does help some vulnerable people in our community and I would hate to see it just being thrown out,? she said.

While Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson said he was ?concerned? with the survey results, he also pointed work being done to optimize snow clearing across Aurora, including the purchase of a new side blade for municipal equipment that will make it easier to clear tighter, more intensely-developed subdivisions.

A different perspective was offered by Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, who said continuing a program that doesn't meet its intended needs is ?misleading.?

?I want to acknowledge upfront that windrows' a real challenge, especially for seniors and residents with disabilities and the intent of

this program was right and it came from a place of compassion. However, after three years of piloting, it's clear the program is not delivering reliable or satisfactory results even under the best-case scenarios," he said, citing the poor survey results, including the fact many of those surveyed thought the \$200 fee wasn't value for money.

"This puts the Town in a no-win situation because you have light winters, it equals complaints about value. Heavy winters equals complaints about timing and quality. To materially fix these issues would require millions of dollars in new equipment and staffing, which is simply not realistic or responsible. Discontinuing this pilot does not mean abandoning vulnerable residents; it means acknowledging that this delivery model doesn't work and shifting toward alternatives like grants or reimbursements that give residents control, faster service and dignity.

"This pilot showed us the limits of municipal delivery and we should learn from that. A control grant is more honest than a subsidized delivery service we can't reliably deliver. I'm in favor of the staff recommendation, but certainly I don't want the discussions for other options or solutions to come to an end. I think we keep the dialogue going because we have to find that happy medium. Like all things, there's always compromise."

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese acknowledged the topic of windrows is "divisive" but said "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" wasn't the solution.

"I don't think this pilot is quite done yet," he said, noting the new equipment in this year's budget will position crews to get the job done right.

"It's hard to identify whether it's worth its value or not without doing it right," he said. "Until we have a perfect model, we can't really judge whether it's feasible or isn't feasible."

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