

## Windrow removal pilot extended into 2026-2027 winter

Aurora's windrow removal pilot will continue into the winter of 2026-2027 following a Council decision last week.

The program, which was established for senior residents and residents living with mobility challenges to remove the dense ridge of snow left at the ends of driveways by passing snow plows, will once again be provided at a fee of \$200 for those eligible households, and the financial assistance program for eligible residents will carry forward as well.

Now in its fourth season, the pilot program has experienced several challenges since its inception, as well as mixed feedback from those residents who have taken advantage of the program.

Municipal staff recommended the discontinuation of the program for the winter ahead, but given recent investments in new snow removal equipment in the 2026 Municipal Budget, Council members weren't yet prepared to scrap the program all together.

Prior to last week's vote, the pilot's mixed reviews were reflected by residents delegating to Council both in favour the program's extension as well as staff's original recommendation to wind down the windrow program.

First to delegate was resident John Hartman who cited the costs of maintaining the pilot and a perceived lack of success in previous seasons as reasons to draw a line under the initiative.

'After three less-than-successful pilots, we're kicking it to pilot four hoping the outcome will change. We all know that hope is not a strategy. I propose we look at this as we did years ago as a high school science experiment,' said Hartman. 'The control experiment is we do nothing, something that Aurora would support. Experiments one, two, three, or what we call pilots one, two, three, and those experiments, we have lots of data and defined outcomes such as, 'it did not work,' 'let's blame the weather,' 'failed equipment,' 'it's very costly,' every time the majority of participants were dissatisfied with the service. Now in experiment four, or pilot four being debated tonight by some members, they say, 'Let's try it again.' I applaud the effort by our snow removal crews, but it's the results and the impact that truly matter.

'In three years, the Town has spent over \$260,000 of tax payers' money or \$10,000 per snow event against a collection of \$50,000 in fees. Please also remember that almost one third of participants do not pay due to their own personal circumstances. Added to this are the direct costs or countless hours of staff time designing, debating and researching and answering hundreds of complaints. I'm all in for helping seniors, the disabled and those that have a serious need for windrow clearing, but not at this level.

'Here's an idea: let's try pilot 4A or experiment 4A without spending \$140,000 this year. Allocate funding [of] \$200 per qualified residents to those residents in need or qualify and identify a single service provider to do windrows and windrows only. In the end, we will save taxpayers money this fiscal year, save staff time, staff headaches and, in the end, a different comparative model.'

Discontinuing the pilot wouldn't be a slight against vulnerable residents, but 'acknowledging that this delivery model doesn't work and shifting towards alternatives like grants or reimbursements that give residents control, faster service and dignity.'

A senior's perspective was offered by Boris Gartsbein who said that while many residents see a windrow as an 'inconvenience,' it can be a 'significant health risk' for others.

'The snow windrow is often packed, salty, wet, and extremely heavy. For seniors and residents with physical disabilities, clearing snow is a dangerous task,' he said. 'Every year, we hear stories of seniors suffering injuries or experiencing serious health episodes while trying to clear their driveways. For us, this program is not a luxury. It is a matter of safety and long-term health.

'While the moral argument for supporting our most vulnerable residents is clear, I also want to address the economic concerns. Some have suggested this program is too costly. I have reviewed the available data, and I would like to offer some perspective'. In

the 2024-25 season, there were 468 participants. With a fee of \$100, revenue was \$38,400 against a total cost of \$91,000, resulting in a net operation cost of roughly \$53,000. In the 2025-26 season, with the fee increased up to \$200, participation dropped to 276. Even if we assume that the net operating cost remained at the same level of \$53,000, we must look at what it actually means for our Town. Aurora has over 21,500 private households. When you divide this \$53,000 cost across all households, it amounts to less than \$2.50 per household per year. In fact, I even do not count the contribution from the Aurora's businesses, so it should be about \$1 per year per household. If \$1 or \$2 per household per year is high price to pay for the safety of independence of our seniors and residents with disabilities, I believe it is small necessary investment in our community's well-being.

?Finally, I have a gentle reminder for those who may be considering discontinuing this program. One day, you too will be seniors. We're asking for your empathy and our support today, just as you may need support in the future. Many seniors and residents with disabilities rely on this service to stay safe in their homes. Please do not ignore us. I urge you to maintain this vital program. It could be better, but it was okay; it's much, much better than nothing, so please continue at least like this. And about fees, I think it could be dropped back to \$100. In this case, it will be better for seniors, and I believe it will be more participants and more giving you at the end.?

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