

Should Windrow Removal Program have more stringent criteria?

If Aurora brings back its Windrow Removal Pilot Program this year, should there be stricter rules on eligibility?

That was a question mulled by local lawmakers at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting.

Council this week is considering moving forward with a modified program for the winter ahead, this time with fees in a partial cost-recovery model rather than the free program seen in the winter of 2023-24. But discussion turned to ensuring residents who actually need the program, such as seniors and residents with mobility challenges, actually benefit from it.

Concerns were raised by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, who said a ?number of people? have had questions regarding eligibility, particularly households where seniors do indeed live, but there might be a younger person under the roof who is ?capable? of removing that last bit of snow from the end of the driveway.

?It is important for the integrity of the program that we're diligent about this.,? said Councillor Weese of ensuring eligibility, questioning whether a fine of some kind would be effective in this goal.

Staff said that, as the program currently stands, residents sign a declaration stating they meet the criteria of either being 65 years of age or older, or ?have a physical disability that limits them from participating in shovelling snow.? They also admitted, however, that Town Hall received complaints from some neighbours during the initial pilot that, in some cases, ?able-bodied? individuals were living with some of the senior applicants.

?From the standpoint [of] staff, it is very hard for us to control or deal with it without knocking on the door and asking for proof ourselves,? said Sara Tienkamp, Aurora's Director of Operational Services. ?We're going on the truth that somebody has signed and acknowledged that they are the only people in the house that are capable of doing that.

?Certainly, other municipalities have been trying to deal with this as well. It's difficult for us as municipalities to deal with that and prove it. Some municipalities have implemented a cost recovery program where residents are responsible for paying for the service, or a nominal fee towards the service, and that seems to help weed out some of the people that are, maybe, not eligible for the program or applying the program when they are not qualified.?

Councillor Weese said considering these factors would ensure the ?integrity? of the program, and also asked whether income thresholds should be considered for eligibility ? particularly who might have to pay and who might not.

?I like the notion of cost recovery, but on the other hand then we have so many other seniors who are struggling economically, we want to make sure they're safe with their windrows cleaned out,? he said. ?There are economies of scale for everybody to have it or many people to have it, but we also can't afford to have everyone having it unless we are targeting those people who are low income or those?who are older. I like the work that has been done thus far?[but if we can] find a way that the eligibility is clear to everybody, and if there is an option for cost recovery from people that should be able to get that.

?I don't want any seniors or disabled people to be struggling with this, particularly if they are unfunded.?

By Brock Weir