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Residential Winter Windrow Opening Service Update Information Report

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the 2025/26 Residential Winter Windrow Opening Service Pilot Program. At the June 2, 2025 Committee of the Whole Meeting, Staff Report #2025-35 was passed directing staff to implement a pilot project for the winter 2025-26 season. The service was approved and intended for households with residents who are 65 years of age and over, or who have a disability, and who also demonstrate a financial limitation. Staff were to report back to council with findings from the pilot program in Q2 2026.

Given the expedited rollout, brief implementation timeline, atypical winter conditions, and limited data, staff are of the opinion that the present information is not sufficient to comprehensively reflect findings from the program yet. Staff will continue gathering data evidence and provide a report to Council in Q2 2027 with a formal summary of pilot program.

Background

Public Works Services (PWS) staff were directed to evaluate the feasibility of implementing the Residential Winter Windrow Opening Service. This review included assessing operational requirements, estimating associated costs, and benchmarking similar programs offered in other municipalities. Findings and recommendations were subsequently presented to the Council to guide decision-making.

At the June 2, 2025 Committee of the Whole Meeting, Staff Report #2025-35 was passed, and Council directed staff to proceed with a pilot program during the 2025/26

winter season. The pilot was designed to evaluate demand, operational impacts, associated costs, and the overall impact of the program.

During the 2025/26 winter season, the municipality implemented a pilot Residential Winter Windrow Opening Service to support senior residents experiencing financial barriers or residents living with disabilities experiencing financial barriers that limit their ability to perform snow removal. The program focused on clearing the snow windrow deposited at the end of driveways following municipal plowing operations. Eligible residents were able to apply for the service at no cost, enhancing safe and reliable access to their homes during significant winter events. Feedback and operational data were collected throughout the season intended to help inform staff's recommendations and ultimately Council's consideration of potential program expansion, permanent implementation, or an alternative approach.

Discussion

The pilot program was readied through contracted services and implemented successfully for those applicants who qualified. Feedback so far from approved program participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Residents indicated that the service was timely, effective, and empathetic to their specific challenges for maintaining safe access to their homes.

The overall analysis of the program was made difficult by a number of factors that contributed to data that may be limited, atypical, or require further collection. These factors included, but were not limited to, the number of applicants, the addition of participants mid-season, and the nature of the atypical winter conditions and duration experienced during the pilot.

Customer Service received 27 applications that were reviewed against the approved program criteria. Following evaluation, 16 applicants were approved to participate in the pilot program, which was implemented during the 2025/26 winter season. This was a small sample size, and the following feedback was received from the public.

- Residents reported uncertainty regarding application status and approval timelines.
- Limited awareness of the program, particularly among seniors without internet access.
- Some residents only became aware of the program after contacting the Town with complaints.

During the 2025/26 winter season, staff recorded a total snowfall of 131 cm across the Town. There were 16 snow events in which 5 cm or more of snow was recorded, triggering the contractor to clear residential windrows. The 2025/26 season saw an atypical number of events and a longer than average winter maintenance season.

Staff identified some administrative and operational challenges, including managing application deadline extensions and fluctuating demand, ensuring accuracy and consistency of approved applicant lists, and tracking paper-based applications compared to online submissions. While many of these challenges were managed effectively, staff have identified opportunities to further improve the process in order to more accurately identify costs and gather more data to assess the program. Additional promotion and communication of the service together with its application requirements will be undertaken prior to the second winter season of the pilot program.

Given the initial first year rollout of the program, the short duration of implementation, the atypical winter season, resident feedback and the data available to date, staff will continue to gather and assess information to ensure there is sufficient evidence to fully evaluate the pilot and develop a representative summary together with recommendations regarding the service going forward. As a result, staff will report back to Council in Q2 2027 with additional data and analysis to support Council in providing direction.

Consultation

Feedback was provided by Customer Service.

Conclusion

Overall, the 2025/26 Residential Winter Windrow Opening Service Pilot Program provided valuable insight into both the benefits and challenges of offering this type of municipal service. While the program successfully supported 16 residents who met the eligibility requirements, its implementation and data collection were affected by a number of factors and atypical conditions.

Extending the pilot into the 2026/27 winter season will allow for greater promotion and enrollment, more reliable data and feedback, continued refinement of processes, and ultimately a stronger foundation of information to assess the future of this important program with staff reporting back to Council in Q2 of 2027.

Council Priority Association

This report aligns with the following Council Priority: Customer-First Way of Life

Human Resource Considerations

No additional staff required.

Budget Impact

No additional budget will be requested during the pilot program.

Attachments

None

Approval for Distribution

Mark Agnoletto, Director, Public Works Services

Peter Noehammer, Commissioner, Development & Infrastructure Service

Report Contact

For more information on this report, contact info@newmarket.ca.