



REPORT

Budget Committee

Meeting Date: October 19, 2023

FROM: Roads & Works Operations

DATE: October 10, 2023

SUBJECT: Town-Wide Windrow Clearing Program

LOCATION: Municipal Road Corridors

WARD: Town-Wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the information regarding a residential driveway windrow clearing program, as detailed in the report from the Department of Roads and Works Operations dated October 10, 2023, be received.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- There are approximately 55,000 residential driveways in town (1,532 on primary roads, 16,076 on secondary roads, and 37,385 on residential roads).
- Further to the 2023 Budget Committee's consultation, a request from Ward 7 was made for staff to present details of a town-wide residential driveway snow windrow clearing program.
- Oakville currently has a senior citizen and physically challenged persons windrows clearing program; however, the town does not provide town-wide driveway snow windrow clearing service.
- Implementing a town-wide windrow clearing program is a large-scale operation with significant financial implications in the 2023 estimated amount of \$2,593,000 per year (impact of 1.08% increase on the town tax levy and 0.46% increase on overall tax bill, representing a further increase of 37.2% of the 2023 Infrastructure Maintenance winter control budget of \$6,961,300).

- There are additional operational constraints such as limited space to store the additional equipment and impacts to internal staff resources to administer the program.
- Should the town-wide windrow clearing program be approved, it important to note that the town’s windrow service will not be equal to a private driveway clearing service. It is expected that resident expectations will be difficult to manage, complaints on the quality, timeliness, and extent of the windrow clearing will occur.

BACKGROUND:

The town’s current approved winter maintenance service requires clearing of public roadways based on a tiered service level and does not include windrow services town-wide.

The Ontario Municipal Act gives municipalities jurisdiction over the maintenance of town-maintained properties including the road and sidewalk network. Such maintenance includes winter control services to ensure a minimum level of safety for motorists and pedestrians. Compliance with the Provincial Minimum Maintenance Standards (Reg. 239/02) provides municipalities with a defense against claims of default of maintenance for roads and sidewalks. Municipalities are free to establish service levels that exceed the Provincial Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS), but consequently will be held to those higher standards in court.

The Council approved levels of service (LOS) for winter maintenance of primary, secondary, and residential roads and sidewalks as well as snow removal in Business Improvement Areas is provided in Table 1:

Table 1 – Winter maintenance of Municipal Roads in Town of Oakville

	Primary Roads Accumulation up to 2.5 cm	Secondary Roads Accumulation up to 5 cm	Residential and Laneway Accumulation >7.5 cm
Roads LOS	< 6 hr service	< 12 hr service	< 24 hr service

The 2023 approved total operating budget for winter control maintenance relating to roads and sidewalks is \$6,961,300, with the draft 2024 budget planned for \$7,826,200.

The town’s current windrow clearing service is a subsidized fee for service via an application process with eligibility requirement for seniors and persons with accessibility challenges only.

Oakville currently does not provide town-wide driveway snow windrow clearing service. However, in July 2008, Council approved the implementation of an annual program to remove driveway windrows for senior citizens and physically challenged persons for a prescribed annual user fee. Details related to this program is as follows:

- Eligibility Criteria: Residents 65 years of age or older, or residents with a physical disability or medical condition, or has no able-bodied person under the age of 65 living at their residence.
- Time of the service: The windrow removal is only initiated after completion of the residential and laneway winter maintenance activities. Action after 24 hours with 12 hours to complete.
- Windrow clearing area: 80% of the driveway width will be cleared to ensure there is no damage to the curb or sod.
- User fee: 2023/2024 will be \$115.26 (\$102+HST).

Participant registration for the 2022/23 winter season was approximately 450 residents. The 2023 program cost is approximately \$67,300 which equates to \$150 cost per benefitting property. This results in a subsidy amount of one-third or \$48 per benefitting property.

Previously, options for expanding the current snow windrow clearing program to a limited town-wide pilot project was presented, however, not approved at 2011 Budget Committee.

This report has been prepared to summarize details of a full-scale town-wide windrow clearing program, as per a comment from the 2023 Budget Committee's consultation from Ward 7 for a staff report to Budget Committee.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

What is a road windrow?

A road snow windrow is the pile of snow that is left at the bottom of a driveway after the snowplow has cleared the road. Windrow services is not a mandatory service that is normally provided. The Municipal Act does not require a municipality to clear snow windrows at driveways.

What are other municipalities doing with windrows?

Based on a cursory review of cities outside the GTHA (Calgary, Charlottetown, Edmonton, Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City, Saskatoon, St. John's, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Yellowknife, Edmonton) that face colder climates and receive high

snow accumulations, Edmonton is the only city that removes windrows of 30 cm or more that block driveways, while the rest do not.

Staff conducted a scan of the following GTHA municipalities regarding their windrow activities: Burlington, Brampton, Hamilton, Markham, Mississauga, Richmond Hill, Toronto, and Vaughan. The findings are summarized in Table 2 below.

Of the nearby municipalities that were scanned, two municipalities, Richmond Hill and Vaughan, offer a city-wide windrow clearing program. Toronto offers the program only to the areas of Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough. Other municipalities, namely Hamilton, Barrie, London, and Ottawa do not offer any type of windrow program. Brampton, Burlington, Markham, Milton, Oakville, and Oshawa offer a limited program for eligible residents only.

Table 2 – Municipal scan of GTHA Municipalities providing Windrow Clearing

Municipality	City-Wide Program	Selective Windrow Program	Program Size (# Driveways)	Windrow Timeline to complete (after plow)	Cost to Resident (Excluding HST)	Program Cost
Burlington	No	Yes (Seniors)	200	12 hours	\$60 / applicant	\$20,000
		Yes (New in 2023 Seniors & Public)	1000	12 hours	\$125 / applicant	\$145,000
Brampton	No	Yes (Financial Assistance Only Seniors)	2,900	Not applicable	\$300 to \$400 (Grant Reimbursement)	\$1,015,000
Hamilton	No	No	-	-	-	-
Markham	No	Yes (Seniors)	6,900	8 hours	Included in General Tax Levy	\$604,000
Mississauga	No	Yes	700	12 hours	\$200 (No cost where eligible)	\$150,000
Richmond Hill	Yes	-	55,000	13 hours	Included in General Tax Levy	\$4,500,000
Toronto	No	Yes (By geographic area)	260,000	2 hours	Included in General Tax Levy	Not Available
Vaughan	Yes	-	84,000	4 hours	Included in General Tax Levy	\$2,100,000

Of the municipalities that currently provide city-wide windrow clearing programs, there are variations in service levels ranging from 4 to 13 hours to complete, full

driveway width versus partial driveway width clearing. Based on feedback from other municipalities with this service, complaints on the quality, timeliness, and extent of windrow clearing will occur regardless of the approved service level, and the customer expectations is difficult to manage. The municipalities that provide selective windrow program also have variations, such as range in eligibility from using an application system to based on geographic area, timeline to complete, and delivery windrow service versus providing a grant. Staff used the municipality scan to develop Oakville's windrow analysis.

The cities of Markham, Mississauga, and Burlington and other municipalities in Durham Region reviewed a city-wide windrow program; however, they did not receive approval to implement. The City of Burlington recently (September 26, 2023) approved a fee for service windrow pilot of up to 1,000 homes in the amount of \$125+HST per driveway entrance for the entire season.

Town-Wide Windrow Clearing Program – Service Levels

Implementing a full-scale town-wide residential driveway snow windrow-clearing program would be a large-scale operation with significant financial and service level commitments. Staff reviewed the City of Vaughan and the City of Richmond Hill programs and completed the analysis for Oakville.

Town-wide windrow service would include approximately 55,000 residential driveways located on primary, secondary, and residential roads. There will be no consideration for opting out of the service allowed should the program be recommended to proceed town-wide. Driveways located on regional roads, private roads, or driveways that provide access to commercial, industrial or high-rise properties would not be included.

Windrow service would be initiated only if 7.5 cm is reached after the snow event ends regardless of the classification of the road. Complaint is expected for this service level, as primary and secondary roads will receive winter control at 2.5 cm, and 5 cm respectively, such that the road windrows would be left behind and will not be cleared.

Next, staff evaluated completing the service at 4 hours, 12 hours, or 24 hours after plowing is complete. Based on a cost-benefit analysis, the 12-hour service option was the most cost efficient. The windrows would be cleared within 12 hours after all roads have been plowed (i.e., windrow will be completed in hour 36). Although the town will have 12 hours to complete the service, windrow will start soon after each area is cleared, such that the service will have a rolling finish timeline. To illustrate the above, Table 3 below provides some sample timelines once 7.5 cm is reached:

Table 3 – Sample timelines of Windrow Clearing

	Road Plow Complete by:	Windrow Plow Begins by:	Windrow Plow Complete by:
Example 1	Route 1 completed road plow by hour 6 (of the 24-hour window)	Approximately Hour 8	Hour 14-18 (6-10 hours duration)
Example 2	Route 2 completed road plow by hour 12 (of the 24-hour window)	Approximately Hour 14	Hour 20-24
Example 3	Route 3 completed road plow by hour 24 (of the 24-hour window)	Approximately Hour 26	Hour 32-36

Customer will be concerned with how soon the windrow is cleared after the road plow passes their driveway. The expectation of the windrow being cleared immediately after road plow is not a realistic service level that the town's windrow clearing program can meet.

The town service will only clear the windrow for a maximum of one car width (approximately 3m) of the driveway at the curb to eliminate the driveway blockage but does not provide for edge-to-edge clearing of driveway windrows. If town-wide windrow is implemented, the senior windrow application process will cease, and the 80% driveway clearing service level will not continue. Further, windrows caused by sidewalk plowing are not included in the town-wide windrow clearing service, and windrow as a result of sidewalk plow would continue to be the responsibility of the property owner.

The town service will clear the windrow to packed snow level (1-2 inches) and will not be cleared to bare pavement. Residents would need to complete the remaining windrow clearing themselves on their driveway as well as clear to bare pavement if it is desired. See Appendix A – Section 1 for illustration of the width and clearing level of service.

Snow cleared from the residential driveways will be pushed to one end of the driveway and stored in the space between the houses in the boulevard. Town windrow clearing service does not include clearing snowbanks or conducting any type of snow removal operations between houses. Significant number of complaints is expected to be received for the lack of space to push the snow, or snow bank created by town's windrow equipment does not meet resident's expectations.

Town-Wide Windrow Clearing Program – Implementation Considerations

A town-wide windrow service is to be implemented using an external contractor, complemented by additional internal resources to coordinate the contract, address customer service enquiries.

The service is envisioned to be provided using a combination of pick-up trucks with blade attachments and a fleet of specially equipped plow units (tractors/loaders with side-arm attachments). The timeline required for implementation is 12 to 18 months to allow for the procurement process, and the contractor to secure and prepare the necessary specialized equipment. Assuming approval of funding for this program as part of the 2024 budget, a town-wide windrow program would be ready to start in 2025/2026 winter season. There will be no impact anticipated in the 2024 budget, however, a portion of the expenses will be included in 2025 budget and to be annualized in 2026 budget.

The town does not currently have sufficient space to store the necessary additional equipment resources to implement a full-scale town-wide program. The town would need to lease or acquire suitable land large enough to store the equipment, or contractors will have to provide storage grounds within Oakville at additional cost as part of their unit price.

In addition to the equipment requirements, the co-ordination and timing of such an operation will be challenging; additional seasonal staff resources would be required to coordinate the equipment operation, inspection, parking control, by-law and to address what we expect to be very high customer service demands associated with providing this service, including coordination with Service Oakville and Parking Enforcement. The list of staff includes a number of part-time Operational Technicians and Inspectors, seasonal Municipal Compliance Officers, and part-time Service Oakville staff.

The cost of providing a town-wide driveway snow windrow clearing program is quite significant estimated at approximately \$2,593,000 (in 2023 dollars) and represents a further increase of 37.2% of the 2023 winter control budget.

Council has previously been advised the cost of such service to be \$1.2M and \$4.5M in 2008, 2023 respectively. Staff further reviewed the opportunity to optimize equipment usage, compared pricing with neighbouring municipalities and now estimate the program at the service levels noted above to be approximately \$2,593,000 (impact of 1.08% increase on the town tax levy, 0.46% increase on overall tax bill) for the introduction of a town-wide driveway snow windrow clearing program. This represents a further increase of 37.2% of the 2023 Infrastructure Maintenance winter control budget of \$6,961,300. The amount of \$2,593,000 stated above is based on 2023 dollars and will need to be adjusted for inflation should the town-wide windrow clearing program commence in 2025/2026.

Town-Wide Windrow Clearing Program Risks and Challenges

The town's windrow service will not be equal to a private driveway clearing service. It is expected that resident expectations will be difficult to manage, complaints on the quality, timeliness, and extent of the windrow clearing will occur.

Through lessons learned from Vaughan and Richmond Hill, the risks and challenges for delivering a town-wide windrow clearing program can include the following:

- Potential of damage to driveway aprons and private property resulting in increased claims against the town.
- Impact to service levels should parked cars adjacent to or on the driveway prevent the windrow service delivery.
- The time when windrow is cleared after road plow is perceived to take too long.
- Width of clearing does not cover the full driveway.
- Bare pavement windrow clearing is not achieved.
- Left over windrows from sidewalk and windrow removal is not removed.
- Dense driveway spacing, minimal boulevard width, or curb-side sidewalk locations with little or no space for snow storage.
- Residents' unrealistic expectations similar to a private driveway clearing service.

Appendix A shows the windrow program level of service and showcase photos to highlight examples of driveways considered cleared and not cleared for reference.

The town's windrow program service levels do not replace the residents need to clear windrows from the road or sidewalk plow, manage the snow storage pile between properties, clear to bare pavement on their driveways. As a result, residents will still have some clean-up if they want to make it consistent with the remainder of their driveway area, and complaints can routinely be expected due to each homeowner's personal expectations for driveway snow clearing work in comparison to (a) the timeliness of the service delivery, and (b) the perceived quality of the windrow clearing operation.

Implementation of a town-wide windrow program will require development of a comprehensive communication plan (including education) with the recognition that the resident's expectation will be difficult to satisfy regardless of the approved service levels.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

A public process has not been initiated to date. Any approved program will require development of a communication plan including, but not limited to notification and update to town website. The town's windrow service will not be equal to a private driveway clearing service. It is expected that resident expectations will be difficult to manage, complaints on the quality, timeliness, and extent of the windrow clearing will occur.

(B) FINANCIAL

If Council approves the town-wide windrow clearing program, \$2,593,000 is required to be added to the 2025/2026 budget under the Infrastructure Maintenance winter control program. There are no anticipated expenditures in 2024, a portion of the expenses will be included in 2025 budget and to be annualized in 2026 budget with inflationary adjustments.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

This report deals with winter maintenance service levels within municipal road corridors as provided by Roads & Works Operations. Coordination with Corporate Communications, Service Oakville, and Municipal Enforcement will be required.

(D) COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This report addresses Council's strategic priority of Accountable Government where providing town-wide windrow service enhances our current service offerings.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

The windrow program is currently dependent on gas and diesel powered equipment that contribute to the Town's corporate greenhouse gas emissions.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Expectation for Delivery of Town-Wide Windrow Clearing Program

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