

ASSISTED SNOW PROGRAMS

RECOMMENDATION

That the July 11, 2023, Community Services report CS01783, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	LIVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community Safety and Well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● C602 - Accessibility for People with Disabilities ● C409K - Snow and Ice Control 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CO01277 - Snow and Ice Control - Programmed Approach for the 2022-23 Winter Season, July 4, 2022, City Council 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the February 22/24, 2023, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report on the following:

1. Previous assisted snow removal programs provided by the City of Edmonton;
2. Current assisted snow removal programs or initiatives underway;
3. Jurisdictional scan of assisted snow removal programs across Canada, including looking at the current program implemented by Calgary for the special needs assistance for seniors benefit program; and

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4. Summary of potential opportunities for assisted snow removal programs for Edmonton, as well as an estimate of resource and cost implications.

Executive Summary

- Since 2014, the City of Edmonton delivered one snow program (Snow Angels) and one pilot snow program (Snow to Go) by reallocating existing operating funding.
 - The Snow Angels program was a nomination program, providing recognition to volunteers who supported the community with snow removal. The program ran from 2014 to 2017.
 - The Snow to Go pilot provided grant funding to communities in support of assisted snow removal. The pilot ran from 2019 to 2022.
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- Currently, there are no City-funded snow removal assistance programs as the above program and pilot were managed without a dedicated budget allocation.
- A jurisdictional review found that other Canadian municipalities provide different types of programs, including grant funding, volunteer-based and contracted/social enterprise.
 - Some of these programs provide partially or fully subsidized services based on demonstrated financial need.
 - Annual funding for programs ranges from \$100,000 to \$520,000.
- Three options for developing an assisted snow removal program for Edmonton have been identified. High-level budget estimates range from \$109,000 to \$777,000 annually, with some mitigation by leveraging the Provincial Special Needs Assistance for Seniors benefit program.
- Further investigation would be required to determine the community need, potential granting demands and scope and capacity within social agencies and community organizations to undertake building and resourcing an assisted snow removal program.
- Given current capacity, Administration would need to reprioritize existing resources and work to complete the necessary scoping work in advance of a fall supplemental operating budget adjustment request if directed to do so.

REPORT

Each snow season, Administration strives to ensure that sidewalks and pathways on private property are clear of ice and snow, either through direct service delivery, community education, mobilization and enforcement of bylaw provisions. The assisted snow removal services previously provided by Administration (Snow Angels and Snow to Go programs) align with City Policy C602 - Accessibility for People with Disabilities.

1. Previous City of Edmonton Programs

Between 2014 and 2022, Administration reallocated operational funding on an ad hoc basis to support Edmontonians with assistance in removing snow and ice.

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Snow Angels was a nomination program operated from 2014 to 2017 that provided recognition to community snow removal volunteers. The program provided thank you letters, acknowledgement pins, Snow Angel yard signs and had sponsorships for raffle prizes. The program cost approximately \$20,000 over four years and recognized approximately 150 volunteers each year. Community leagues volunteered to promote snow and ice removals and encouraged neighbours to reach out to each other to determine who may need assistance. Ultimately, this program ended as a result of declining interest and nominations from the communities.

The Snow to Go pilot operated from November 2019 through winter 2022/2023 and provided grant funding to community leagues to directly support Edmontonians requesting snow removal assistance. Throughout its four winter seasons, the pilot provided over \$60,000 in grant funds to community leagues, helping approximately 750 Edmontonians each year. In the final 2022/2023 snow season, 49 community leagues applied for snow removal funding through this program. Support and services were provided to seniors, adults with a disability, people with low mobility and newcomers to Canada who may not have been prepared for their first Canadian winter. Community leagues used these grant funds to:

- hire contractors and vendors to provide the snow removal service;
- purchase snow and ice removal tools and materials for newcomers; and
- provide honoraria for community volunteer groups and hire part-time helpers, students and others to provide shovelling services.

Discussions with the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues at the end of the 2022/2023 season indicated that this program would not be supported by community leagues in the future due to insurance and liability risks. The Snow to Go pilot, while successful in engaging leagues and supporting those in need, was unfunded. The 2022/2023 winter season was the last season the pilot ran and has no budget allocated for future seasons.

2. Current City of Edmonton Programs

Currently, there are no City-funded snow removal assistance programs as the above program and pilot were managed without a dedicated budget allocation.

3. Jurisdictional Review Findings

Administration found that major Canadian cities provide a range of assisted snow removal programs to residents. The types of programs available are:

1. Grant programs - providing program funding support to community groups or agencies.
2. Volunteer-based/recognition programs - run by a municipality or community organization, providing volunteer matching support and services to people in need.
3. Contracted and social enterprise-based programs - run by a municipality or community organization, providing snow removal assistance directly or through referral services.

Some programs provide partially or fully subsidized services based on demonstrated financial need.

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Six municipalities, and the Government of Alberta, are included in the jurisdictional scan of assisted snow removal programs (Attachment 1). Each program is managed differently with annual funding ranging from \$100,000 to \$520,000. The enhanced Calgary program is funded at approximately \$500,000 annually in addition to the provincial funding leveraged through the Provincial Special Needs Assistance for Seniors benefit program. The Calgary model includes snow shoveling, grass cutting and light housekeeping duties for lower fixed-income seniors who meet the provincial program's requirements. As part of the service to Calgarians, the program acts as a conduit between the Government of Alberta senior services and provides additional tax levy funding to bridge the gap when the \$1,300 funding limit per household within the provincial program is reached and services are still needed.

Cities such as Calgary, Halifax and Ottawa use contracted and social enterprise programming where services are rendered by the municipality or a contracted vendor and reimbursement is provided to the property owner that meets the requirement under the program. These cities focus their programs on seniors and people with disabilities who are vetted through various application processes.

Regina and Thunder Bay are examples of cities that provide volunteer programs for snow removal, where volunteers are connected with individuals who need snow removal. In addition to volunteer programming, Regina provides grants to community-based organizations to provide snow removal to eligible seniors and people experiencing mobility issues through local community associations.

4. Summary of Potential Opportunities

As demonstrated by the jurisdictional scan, major Canadian municipalities provide assisted snow removal services in some format to seniors and residents with mobility needs. In preparation for winter 2023, Administration will amplify the Government of Alberta's Provincial Special Needs Assistance for Seniors benefit program and other external snow removal programs online, via 311 and through a targeted social media campaign.

Should Council direct Administration to develop and deliver a snow removal assistance program, resourcing and funding would be required. Options that could be explored include using contractors, social agencies (social enterprise) or other organizations looking for socially useful fundraising opportunities.

Possible Program Opportunities		Details
1	Leverage Provincial Assistance Snow Program	Leveraging the Government of Alberta's Provincial Special Needs Assistance for Seniors benefit program (to a maximum of \$1,300/year per household for those that qualify), Administration would require three full-time equivalent (FTE) allocations to intake senior requests and provide a service for snow removal with reimbursement from the Government of Alberta to the City of Edmonton. These FTEs would access the provincial program on behalf of seniors, thereby reducing barriers to access.
2	Expanded Snow Program	Expansion of option #1.

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		<p>This option would continue to leverage the Provincial Special Needs Assistance for Seniors benefit program on behalf of eligible seniors, reducing barriers to accessing this support program.</p> <p>Administration would expand the reach of the program beyond seniors to include people experiencing disabilities or mobility issues who remain in their own home and are connected to a City sidewalk by integrating the data of other City of Edmonton assistance programs (such as DATS and the Assisted Waste Collection program) to build an opt-out snow removal program.</p> <p>Using existing client data, eligible residents would be automatically entered into the service for snow removal support and would receive a letter indicating they could opt-out if they did not need or want the service. An opt-out service may be the City's best opportunity to reach as many people as possible in need of assistance. A comprehensive communication plan would supplement the opt-out program and ensure the program reached as many people as possible needing this snow removal support.</p>
3	Snow Angels Volunteer Program	<p>Reactivation of the Snow Angels volunteer recognition program. Although interest and engagement in the original program waned in the past, a renewed approach would aim to recognize and reward those natural volunteers in the community, similar to other City programs, such as Front Yards in Bloom and Winterscapes.</p>

Budget/Financial Implications

To support the implementation of the programs outlined above, Administration has identified the following requirements for staffing and operating costs. If directed by Council, Administration will bring an unfunded service package request forward for consideration during the 2023 Fall Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment.

	Program Opportunities	# of ongoing FTEs	Estimated Cost Per Year
1	Leverage Provincial Assistance Snow Program	3	\$327,000
2	Expanded Snow Program	3	\$777,000*
3	Snow Angels Volunteer Program	1	\$109,000

*The total cost per year for Option 2 Expanded Snow Program is the cost of Option 1 Snow Liaison program plus an additional \$450,000 in operating costs.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

As snow is a seasonal and regular experience for Edmontonians, community perspectives are shared with Council and Administration regularly through 311 inquiries, emails and, most recently, social marketing research in relation to compliance. In the 2022/2023 snow season, the City of Edmonton dealt with approximately 11,588 inquiries about snow on sidewalks.

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The Snow Angel program on average received 150 applications and requests for recognition per year. The Community Snow to Go program served approximately 980 seniors and property owners in the 2022/2023 season.

GBA+

People with mobility limitations due to age, illness, supporting dependents, or other physical ailments can be impacted socially, mentally, spiritually and physically during the colder months if walkways are not cleared.

Administration recognizes two key principles of Policy C409K - Snow and Ice Control in relation to snow assistance programs:

- Equity: that “prioritization of winter maintenance activities based on equity is required to provide a mobility network that is accessible to people of all abilities and needs, and for all modes of transportation”, and
- Safety: “to prevent slips, trips and falls”. This report provides information to support reducing barriers to clearing sidewalks to allow safe, confident passage during the winter months”.

Attachment

1. Assisted Snow Program Jurisdictional Scan Summary