

ASSISTED SNOW CLEARING PROGRAM PILOT PROJECT - STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

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| Recommendation | | | |
| That the April 8, 2024 Community Services report CS02243, be received for information. | | | |
| Requested 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 Conditions for Service Success |
| 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"> • November 28, 2023, City Council Budget Meeting • July 11, 2023, Community Services report CS01783, Assisted Snow Programs | | |

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Previous Council/Committee Action

At the November 21-22/27-28, 2023, City Council Budget meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report that incorporates feedback from the Accessibility Advisory Committee and Seniors Coordinating Council, to understand their lived experiences, wants and needs related to an assisted snow clearing program pilot project which includes eligibility, program options and a potential service package budget, and a recommended pilot length and timeline.

Executive Summary

- Administration met with key stakeholders and gathered information to understand their lived experiences, wants and needs related to an assisted snow clearing program pilot project. Stakeholders support an assisted snow clearing program in Edmonton. Seniors and people with disabilities are often physically unable to remove snow and some are unable to afford or arrange for snow removal on their own.
- Administration developed two options for an assisted snow-clearing program for people with disabilities and mobility challenges, seniors and other residents with emergent needs. Providing a simple sign-up process reduces barriers and is a priority for Administration in developing an assisted snow clearing program.
- Two program options are available, with annual operating cost budget estimates between \$875,000 and \$1.2 million. The Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program is likely to provide some funding for an assisted snow clearing program. If funding is confirmed, Administration would run a two-year pilot of the preferred option for winter seasons 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- As a result of OP12 work completed in 2023, this service would be considered non-core as other levels of government already provide services and supports. Given the support programs that currently exist, Administration does not recommend the addition of a City snow clearing program and funding.

REPORT

Keeping sidewalks clear of snow and ice supports safe mobility during the winter months. Edmontonians are required to remove snow and ice on and adjacent to their private property and the surrounding sidewalk as quickly as possible after a snowfall in accordance with Bylaw 14600. Administration met with the Accessible Advisory Committee and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council to understand their lived experiences, wants and needs regarding an assisted snow clearing pilot program.

Some Canadian municipalities offer assisted snow clearing programs to help residents remove snow on their private property. The City delivered one volunteer assisted snow clearing program, Snow Angels, which ran from 2014 to 2017 (total cumulative cost of \$20,000 during this period) and one pilot, Snow to Go which ran from 2019 to 2022 (total cumulative cost of \$60,000 during

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this period). Both programs were managed within existing budgets. Currently, the City does not fund an assisted snow clearing program.

Seniors experiencing low-income can receive financial assistance to help cover the cost of specific health and personal supports, including snow removal, through the Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program¹. During the 2023/2024 winter season, Administration highlighted the program on the City of Edmonton website². The City of Edmonton website also encouraged residents to remove snow and ice from neighbours' sidewalks and made a certificate available for community members to recognize neighbours. Approximately 9,700 unique users visited the Residential Sidewalk Snow and Ice page between November 1, 2023 and March 1, 2024. The Snow Angels certificate was downloaded 157 times.

Proposed Program Overview

As directed, Administration has developed two program options for Council's consideration. For both options, there would be no direct cost to residents receiving snow removal services. The City would pay approved vendors to provide snow removal services. In the case of seniors, the City would administer billing on behalf of the senior and recover some of these costs through the Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors benefit program. For people with disabilities and mobility challenges, the City would pay for snow removal services through funding approved by Council.

Option 1: Assisted Snow Removal

The Assisted Snow Removal option includes:

- 1) Providing snow removal services for seniors 65 years or older living on lower fixed incomes, using the Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program to offset costs to seniors eligible for the provincial program.
- 2) Providing assisted snow removal for people with disabilities or mobility issues.
- 3) Working with community leagues to support emergent needs around snow removal.

| Assisted snow removal | Details |
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| 1. Leverage the Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program. | Seniors with low income can receive financial assistance for snow removal through the Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program. Administration would access the provincial program for Edmonton seniors, facilitating the application process and arranging for vendors to remove snow from the front walkway and public sidewalks around the property. Seniors meeting the provincial program's eligibility criteria would be entered into the City's assisted snow removal program. There would be no need to confirm eligibility annually. |

¹ Government of Alberta. (2024). Special Needs Assistance for Seniors <https://www.alberta.ca/seniors-special-needs-assistance>

² City of Edmonton. (2024). Residential Sidewalk Snow and Ice https://www.edmonton.ca/transportation/on_your_streets/sidewalk-snow-removal.

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| | <p>Administration would send receipts to the Government of Alberta to be recovered up to a maximum of \$1,356 per year per household in alignment with the limit in the provincial program. This approach would streamline access to the program and alleviate the financial burden on individual seniors to pay for snow clearing and wait for reimbursement. The cost of all vendor services to low-income seniors participating in the program would be fully recoverable under Option 1 while the Administrative costs will require tax levy support.</p> |
| <p>2. Provide snow removal assistance for people with disabilities and mobility challenges.</p> | <p>Administration would arrange for vendors to remove snow from the front walkway and public sidewalks around the property from households requiring assistance. Administration would cover the cost of snow removal through funding approved by Council, up to a maximum of \$1,356 per year per household.</p> <p>Residents participating in other City assistance programs such as DATS and the Assisted Waste Collection program would be automatically entered into the service for snow removal support. Residents would receive a letter indicating they could opt out if they did not need or want the service. More than 1,000 Edmontonians currently participate in the Assisted Waste Collection Program.</p> <p>An opt-out service would allow the City to quickly provide snow removal to those requiring assistance, with no additional complicated signup process - a priority for seniors and people with disabilities and mobility challenges. An opt-out service would be renewed annually to account for changes in addresses or home ownership.</p> |
| <p>3. Community Leagues</p> | <p>Administration would work with community leagues to address emergent needs around snow removal, such as supporting newcomers with snow removal during their first winter in Canada.</p> <p>Due to the impact of snow removal programs on the cost of insurance if EFCL were to directly provide snow clearing services, EFCL would instead provide access to equipment, such as snow shovels, to interested community leagues. In turn, leagues would make the equipment accessible for community members or provide honoraria for community volunteer groups to provide shovelling services.</p> |

Option 2: Assisted Snow Removal - Enhanced

Option 2 consists of the same three parts as Option 1, but with additional funds to supplement the Government of Alberta’s Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program. Seniors also use the provincial program for mowing and light housekeeping, meaning it may not cover all of their snow removal costs. This has been the experience in Calgary, where the City of Calgary’s

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Administration leverages the provincial program as part of its Seniors Services Home Maintenance program. Increasing the budget for the assisted snow removal program in Edmonton would address a potential shortfall for low-income seniors in covering home maintenance expenses. People with disabilities are not eligible for support through the Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program and could not receive support for mowing and light housekeeping through this program. City costs would not be recoverable under Option 2.

Option 2 was included in this report following the July 11, 2023, Community and Public Services Committee where Community Services report CS01783, Assisted Snow Programs was originally discussed. During that meeting, Committee members asked how Administration could enhance the snow removal program to support other types of home maintenance seniors may need throughout the year, not just focusing on winter.

Centralized Application Process for Subsidized Programs

Stakeholders expressed interest in a centralized application process allowing residents to apply for all/any subsidized City programs and services (such as Assisted Waste Collection, DATS and Leisure Access Pass) with a single application. Administration is not recommending this option. While Administration recognizes the benefits of a centralized application process, multiple departments currently manage subsidized programs. Additional staffing and time would be required to develop and implement a centralized intake process. The program options in this report focus on an assisted snow clearing pilot as requested by Council.

Recommended Pilot Length and Timeline

If directed to do so by Council, Administration would run a two-year pilot for the 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 winter seasons. Administration would work closely with stakeholders to develop and implement the program and refine the program based on their feedback.

Potential Number of Participants

In consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and Edmonton Seniors Coordination Council, Administration anticipates between 2,500 to 3,500 residents would participate in an assisted snow clearing program. This estimate is based on:

- the number of households from Edmonton in the provincial government's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program (500 to 600 annually),
- the number of households in the City's Assisted Waste Collection and DATS programs, and
- additional advertising and marketing of the program within the Seniors Home Supports Program and other channels for the communities involved in the pilot would likely result in additional participation.

Budget/Financial Implications

To support the implementation of the programs outlined above, Administration has identified the following requirements for each of the two options. As a result of OP12 work completed in 2023, this service would be considered non-core. There are also pressures within the current operating budget and any additional growth projects would need to be managed with fiscal restraint.

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Option 1: Assisted Snow Removal

The estimated annual tax levy cost for the program is \$857,000, which would include funding for:

- three full-time equivalent (FTE) positions to administer the program,
- contractors and vendors to provide snow removal service, and
- funding for community leagues to support emergent needs around snow removal.

Option 2: Assisted Snow Removal - Enhanced

This would include the estimated annual cost in Option 1 plus an additional \$300,000 in annual operating costs for a total cost of approximately \$1.2 million per year. The \$300,000 in additional funding is to cover shortfalls experienced by seniors using the Government of Alberta's Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program, to a maximum of \$1,356 per year, per person.

Community Insight

Administration sought advice and feedback from the Accessibility Advisory Committee and Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council on a snow clearing program. Stakeholder feedback shows strong support for an assisted snow clearing program in Edmonton. Stakeholders indicated that many seniors and people with disabilities cannot clear snow and ice from walkways and would like to see the City fund and implement a program that addresses this issue, noting that it would improve accessibility for all Edmontonians while ensuring compliance with Bylaw 14600 requiring Edmontonians to clear sidewalks around their homes (Attachment 1).

Council and Administration regularly receive inquiries concerning compliance with snow removal on sidewalks. Between November 1, 2023, and January 31, 2024, 2,264 inquiries were received.

GBA+

People with mobility and accessibility challenges due to age, illness, or disability have greater difficulty moving around in snowy and icy conditions. They can be impacted socially, mentally, spiritually and physically during the colder months if walkways are not cleared. Property owners whose sidewalks are not cleared of snow face a warning or a \$100 fine under *Community Standards Bylaw 14600*.

Administration recognizes the following principles in relation to snow assistance programs:

Policy C409K - Snow and Ice Control:

- *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"

Policy C602 - Accessibility for People with Disabilities:

- *Removing barriers*: "barriers to accessibility are the basis of inequality between people with and without disabilities"

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Council's declaration to work towards making Edmonton age-friendly is also significant in relation to the snow assistance program. An age-friendly city is "an inclusive place where age is not a barrier to access services, programs, businesses or facilities."

Attachment

1. Stakeholder Feedback - Assisted Snow Removal