



**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

June 1, 2015

SRCS.15.34

Community Services Department  
Public Works Operations Division

**SUBJECT: Process for Public Consultation on Expanding the Windrow  
Clearing Program  
(SRCS.15.34)**

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**PURPOSE:**


The purpose of this report is to address Council's request for additional information on the process for public consultation on expanding the windrow clearing program.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That Option A described in Staff Report SRCS.15.34 - Process for Public Consultation on Expanding the Windrow Clearing Program be approved.

Contact: Grant Taylor, Director of Public Works Operations, ext. 2966

Submitted by:

  
Shane Baker  
Commissioner of Community Services

Approved by:

  
M. Joan Anderton  
Chief Administrative Officer

## **BACKGROUND:**

At the February 3, 2015 Budget Committee of the Whole meeting staff reported back on windrow clearing service enhancement alternatives including the cost and feasibility of providing a Town wide windrow clearing program (SRCS.15.07). The report is attached for information in Appendix A. The report presented three options:

- Option 1 – Outsourced Town Wide Windrow Clearing Program
- Option 2 – Enhanced In-house Windrow Clearing Level of Service
- Option 3 – Outsourced Seniors/Disabled Resident Windrow Clearing Program

The report (SRCS.15.07) was referred back to staff and staff were asked to report back with additional information on the process for public consultation on expanding the windrow clearing program.

## **OPTIONS FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION:**

Staff contacted Environics Research Group to obtain options for consulting with the community on potentially expanding the windrow clearing program. Environics Research Group previously conducted the Town's 2012 Community Survey. Two options for consulting with the community were provided.

### **Option A - Traditional Telephone Poll**

The first option is a statistically valid telephone poll that would include a random sample of 400 residents in Richmond Hill. This sample size would provide a margin of error of 4.8%. Anything below 5% is considered to be a good margin of error for a survey of this size. The poll would last no longer than 5 minutes. The benefit of this option is that telephone polls are the preferred choice for more complex surveys. This allows for a more detailed explanation of the purpose of the survey and survey questions for respondents before they answer. The contract with Environics would also require that certain quotas be filled to ensure there is adequate representation of residents including a male/female mix and equal representation from all wards. This would be a statistically valid survey that will provide reliable data and feedback on the windrow clearing program for consideration by Council.

Formal survey questions cannot be prepared unless the Town hires Environics to undertake this survey. However, Town staff have prepared some sample questions that would be used to initiate discussions with Environics should Council choose this option. The questions are attached in Appendix B.

### **Option B - Online Survey Administered by Town Staff**

The second option includes the design of survey questions by Environics Research Group that would be used in an online survey administered by Town staff. The survey would be posted on the Town website for response by the community. The benefit of

this option is that it would allow survey experts to design the survey questions. Environics Research Group are experts in good survey questionnaire design and would ensure that survey questions are properly structured. However, there are drawbacks to this approach. This approach would not provide statistically valid survey data and does not guarantee a minimum response rate.

### **Option C – Survey Questions and Online Survey Administered by Town Staff**

This third option includes the design of the survey questions by Town staff. The survey would then be posted on the Town website for response by the community. This option is the most cost effective and can be quickly implemented. However, this approach would not provide statistically valid survey data and does not guarantee a minimum response rate.

### **ADDITIONAL BENCHMARKING INFORMATION ON WINDROW CLEARING PROGRAMS**

In addition to researching options for public consultation on enhancing the windrow clearing program, staff also undertook additional benchmarking to provide Council further information regarding how this program is administered in other municipalities. The results of the benchmarking are included in Appendix C of this staff report.

A benchmarking survey regarding the Town's driveway windrow service was prepared and circulated by staff to comparator and neighbouring municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area. The City of Markham, City of Vaughan, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, King Township, City of Burlington and the City of Toronto all completed the survey.

It is important to note that many municipalities within the Greater Toronto Area do not provide driveway windrow service. The Town of Aurora, Town of Newmarket, Town of East Gwillimbury, City of Brampton, City of Barrie, City of Kitchener and City of Hamilton do not provide this service. Of the 25 local municipalities in the GTA only two provide the service to all households. These are the City of Vaughan and the City of Toronto. The City of Toronto provides the service only where it is mechanically possible to do so. For example, streets with monolithic sidewalks (those which run immediately alongside to a street with no easements) and on street parking do not receive the service.

Richmond Hill currently provides a similar service to Markham, Whithurch-Stouffville and King Township. These municipalities also provide windrow clearing service to seniors either 60 or 65 years of age or older or residents who have a disability preventing them from being able to perform the activity. All residents must apply each year to continue receiving the service.

The majority of municipalities included in the review do not charge a fee to residents for the windrow clearing service. The City of Burlington is the one exception. Windrow clearing service is offered at a cost to the resident. The fee is \$51 and is non-refundable. The program is limited to individuals with disabilities and has a maximum of 150 registrants. Staff in Burlington report that although there is a cap the program has not exceeded 125 registrants.

## Windrow Clearing Program Costs

The total cost of the windrow clearing program varies amongst neighbouring municipalities. The cost of the Vaughan city wide program is approximately \$1,300,000 per year for windrow clearing and an additional \$2,000,000 that is required for snow removal. As mentioned in the previous staff report (SRCS.15.07) there is significant road narrowing as a result of repeated snow spillage from the tractor attachment that is used by the contractor. This attachment is required to remove snow on primary and secondary roads. Road narrowing occurs when there is a lack of space available for snow clearing on certain streets and the snow spillage causes the right-of-way to be narrower than most other municipal streets. This snow cannot be placed on top of boulevards and must be pushed to the curb. It is important to note that Vaughan reported that they conduct, on average, 5-7 snow events per year however; the additional snow removal is only completed 1-2 times per year. This results in the total cost of the program being approximately \$3,300,000 per year. This service is provided to 80,000 driveways at a cost of approximately \$16.25 per driveway. When the additional snow removal cost is included this increases to \$41.25 per driveway.

The cost of the program at the City of Toronto is approximately \$5,000,000 and is also provided by a contractor. The service is provided to 252,000 driveways at a cost of approximately \$20.00 per driveway. Staff have asked if this cost includes snow removal and are waiting for confirmation from Toronto. At the City of Markham the approximate cost of the program is \$194,350. The service is provided to 3,100 driveways at a cost of approximately \$62.50 per driveway.

The windrow clearing service in Richmond Hill is performed in-house by staff who conduct the Town's winter plow operations. The cost of the current windrow clearing program in Richmond Hill is \$64,000. The program has grown significantly over the past nine years. In 2005, there were 600 applicants. Today this service is provided to 1,400 driveways at a cost of approximately \$45.00 per driveway. Staff report SRCS.15.07 provided three alternatives for the windrow clearing program with associated costs.

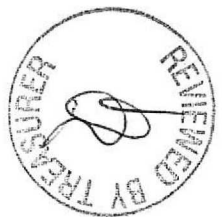
## FINANCIAL/STAFFING/OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Option A

The cost associated with a traditional telephone poll is approximately \$12,000. This would include all deliverables such as survey design, field work and a final report. This option can be funded through the 2015 Community Services Department Operating Budget.

### Option B

The cost for the design of survey questions to be used in an online survey administered by Town staff would be approximately \$4,000. This option can be funded through the 2015 Community Services Department Operating Budget.



## Option C

There are no financial implications associated with Option C. The development of an online survey can be accommodated using existing staff resources.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Public consultation regarding an improved driveway windrow clearing program aligns with the Strategic Plan goal of Stronger Connections in Richmond Hill by exploring ways to respond to the changing needs of the community and increasing accessibility for those with disabilities.

### **CONCLUSION:**

This report has provided Council with three options for consulting with the community on potentially expanding the windrow clearing program. One option (A) is to undertake a statistically valid telephone poll that would include a random sample of 400 residents in Richmond Hill. The second option (B) includes the design of survey questions by Environics Research Group that would to be used in an online survey administered by Town staff. The third option (C) includes the design of the survey questions and an online survey administered by Town staff. Staff are recommending that Option A be approved by Council.

### **APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – SRCS.15.07 - Windrow Clearing Service Enhancement Alternatives  
Appendix B – Potential Windrow Clearing Service Survey Approach and Questions  
Appendix C – Windrow Service Program Benchmarking



**BUDGET COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**  
February 3, 2015  
SRCS.15.07

Community Services Department  
Public Works Operations Division

**SUBJECT: Windrow Clearing Service Enhancement Alternatives  
(SRCS.15.07)**

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**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to present windrow clearing service enhancement alternatives for Council's consideration.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

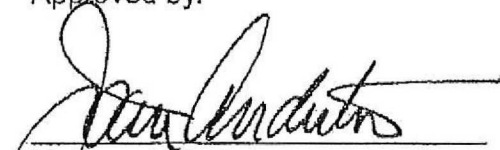
That Council receives SRCS.15.07 for consideration.

Contact: Grant Taylor, Director of Public Works Operations, extension 2966

Submitted by:

  
Shane Baker  
Commissioner of Community Services

Approved by:

  
M. Joan Anderton  
Chief Administrative Officer



## BACKGROUND:

At the December 8, 2014 Committee of the Whole meeting, staff were directed to investigate and report back regarding windrow clearing service enhancement alternatives including the cost and feasibility of providing a Town wide windrow clearing program.

### Town of Richmond Hill Windrow Program

Town staff clear approximately 1400 driveway windrows for eligible residents that are over 65 years of age or have a disability preventing them from being able to perform this activity. Applicants are required to provide proof of age and/or a medical certificate with their annual application and confirm that no one resides in the residence that is capable of performing this activity. Applications can be submitted online (new service level in 2015), by mail or fax.

The program precludes the removal of windrows left behind from sidewalk plowing operations, subsequent spot plowing operations and driveways that were not originally serviced due to obstructions such as parked cars.

The windrow clearing service is performed by the staff who conduct the Town's winter plow operations and therefore, driveway windrow clearing is initiated after the cessation of a road plowing operation. The current level of service for the Town's windrow removal program is a 30 hour response time which was approved by Council in 2005 (SRW.05.12). It has become increasingly more difficult to meet the approved level of service for windrow clearing due to an 8% increase in road lane kms since 2005 (which has increased the time required to complete a plowing operation before windrow clearing can begin), as well as an increase in the number of applicants in the windrow program (approx. 600 in 2005 vs. 1400 today) and the introduction of legislative restrictions regarding hours of service for driving which restrict operator driving times to 13 hours within a 24 hour time period.

The cost associated with the current windrow clearing program was approximately \$64,000 in 2014 related to staff time and equipment operating costs.

### City of Vaughan Windrow Clearing Program

The City of Vaughan provides a city wide windrow clearing program for its residents. The level of service in Vaughan requires that 80,000 driveway windrows are cleared within 16 hours from the commencement of road plowing operations. This activity is accomplished through the use of 42 contracted tractors equipped with a modified plow arm attachment. The attachment drops down at each driveway entrance, pushes the snow across the driveway end where the operator then lifts the attachment. The tractor works in tandem with the lead road snow plow.

Contractors are paid an operating and stand-by rate and are provided an equipment storage area and fuel.

Vaughan's annual budget for windrow clearing is approximately \$1,500,000. An additional \$2,000,000 is budgeted for snow removal. The City of Vaughan has recognized over the years in providing this service that there is a significant amount of road narrowing as a result of repeated snow spillage from the tractor attachment which necessitates extensive snow removal operations from primary and secondary roads.

The program does not include the removal of the windrows left behind from the sidewalk plowing operation or a return to clear windrows that were not originally serviced due to obstructions such as parked cars.

Staff report that there are issues with the program as with any winter maintenance operation. In this case, during heavy or repeated snow storms where the snowfall accumulations are in excess of 10 cm (4 inches) the plow blade becomes less effective and spillage occurs resulting in resident complaints. Vaughan residents are made aware that the purpose of the program is to open driveway ends to provide access, not necessarily to provide a complete clean-up that will not require further attention by the homeowner. However, the introduction of the program has created a high level of service expectation resulting in a marked increase in the number of complaints received. In addition, the blade attachment used to clear the windrow has been reported to cause damage to residential frontages including driveway aprons, curbing, landscaping, headwalls, culverts and boulevards. Also, the program interferes with garbage and recycling pick-up and is greatly hindered by parked vehicles.

#### City of Markham

The City of Markham currently outsources a windrow clearing program, similar to the Town's program, providing this service exclusively to seniors and residents with disabilities. Markham's level of service requires that windrows are cleared within 12-16 hours after the cessation of a road plowing operation. The operation is accomplished through the use of 10 contracted pick-up trucks with plow blades which clear approximately 3000 driveway windrows. The contractor is paid a stand-by rate plus a unit cost per driveway cleared.

Staff were unable to determine the City of Markham's annual operating budget for windrow clearing.

### **ANALYSIS & PROPOSALS**

The following are alternatives to improve the Town's current windrow program:

#### Option 1 – Outsourced Town Wide Windrow Clearing Program

At Council's request, staff has reviewed the cost and feasibility to implement a windrow removal program in Richmond Hill utilizing the same level of service as Vaughan. Staff have determined that it would be feasible to implement such a program provided it is outsourced and there are interested bidders. Based on the City of Vaughan experience, staff estimate the annual budget required to outsource this service would be \$2,650,000



for windrow clearing and snow removal. This estimate assumes the service would be provided to approximately 55,000 residential homes utilizing 28 dedicated tractors with windrow clearing attachments.

The supply of fuel and the potential requirement for equipment storage will need further investigation to determine operational efficiency and the associated cost implications and therefore is not included in the above estimate.

Considering the significant drawbacks which include significant increased funding required to provide the service, damage to existing frontages and unreasonably high level of service expectations, staff do not recommend this option for an enhanced windrow program.

#### Option 2 – Enhanced In-house Windrow Clearing Level of Service

Staff has evaluated an alternative option to augment the existing in-house windrow clearing service level which, in most cases, is not being achieved. This option proposes that an additional six dedicated seasonal staff and equipment could be used to provide an estimated level of service in which windrows would be cleared within 16 hours after the cessation of a road plowing operation (depending on the severity of the snow event) at a cost of approximately \$200,000 per year. In addition to the annual operating cost there would be a first year capital cost of approximately \$350,000 for six heavy duty pick-up trucks with plow attachments.

As stated earlier, currently plowing operations commence once a snow accumulation of 5 cm is reached and the windrow clearing operation begins at the cessation of the plowing operation (depending on available resources which are limited by hours of service legislation). In this scenario, with dedicated windrow clearing staff and equipment, an enhanced windrow service would commence 4-5 hours after plowing operations are initiated given that it takes that amount of time to plow primary roads. Once the resources had cleared the windrows on primary roads they would then proceed to clear windrows on secondary roads.

The benefit of this alternative is that the seasonal staff can be assigned other duties when not required for a snow event and the vehicles can be used for other operations year round. However, it should be noted that providing this service in-house exposes the Town to liability and poses ongoing challenges related to human resource management, supervision and administrative support.

#### Option 3 – Outsourced Seniors/Disabled Resident Windrow Clearing Program

This option proposes an outsourced alternative to Option 2 above and assumes the same level of service provided by the same number of units. Staff estimate the cost of this outsourced service to be approximately \$250,000 per year.

**FINANCIAL/STAFFING/OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

Option 1 – Outsourced Town Wide Windrow Clearing Program

- Level of service target is 16 hours from the commencement of road plowing operations.
- Estimated cost = \$2,650,000 per year.
- There are no additional staffing requirements related to this option.
- This option would require a competitive bidding process. The ability and timing required to implement this option would depend on the availability of interested bidders. It is unlikely that this option could be implemented in 2015 as bidders would need time to acquire customized equipment.

Option 2 – Enhanced In-House Seniors/Disabled Resident Windrow Clearing Program

- Level of service target is 16 hours after the cessation of a road plowing operation.
- Estimated cost = \$350,000 startup capital cost for equipment which would have a seven year life cycle (equal to an annual equipment cost of \$50,000) in addition to an annual operating cost of \$200,000 per year.
- This option assumes the addition of six seasonal roads operators for 21 weeks, one casual administrative staff for 25 weeks and one operator upgrade to a leadhand for 21 weeks (these costs are included in the estimated operating cost above).
- This option could be implemented for the fall winter season starting November 2015.

Option 3 – Outsourced Seniors/Disabled Resident Windrow Clearing Program

- Level of service target is 16 hours after the cessation of a road plowing operation.
- Estimated cost = \$250,000 per year.
- There are no additional staffing requirements related to this option.
- This option would require a competitive bidding process. The ability and timing required to implement this option would depend on the availability of interested bidders. However, it is assumed that this option could likely be implemented for the fall winter season starting November 2015.

**RELATIONSHIP TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Considering an improved driveway windrow clearing program aligns with the Strategic Plan goal of *Stronger Connections in Richmond Hill* by exploring ways to respond to the changing needs of the community and increasing accessibility for those with disabilities.

**CONCLUSION:**

This report presents alternatives to enhance the Town's windrow clearing program for Council's consideration.

### Potential Windrow Clearing Service Survey Approach and Questions

The telephone survey would begin with introductory comments regarding the purpose of the survey and information on snow windrows.

#### Purpose & Background Information:

The Town of Richmond Hill is conducting a survey about windrow clearing in the Town. A snow windrow is the pile of snow that is left at the bottom of a driveway after the snow plow has cleared the road. Richmond Hill currently has a Snow Windrow Removal Assistance Program that is offered to residents who are 65 and older and to residents with disabilities. This is provided at a cost of \$64,000 per year. The Town is considering increasing the response time to existing users of this program or expanding this service Town wide to all residents in Richmond Hill. The answer to these questions will help the Town understand whether residents support an increase to the current level of service.

Questions for respondents that are aware of the Town's windrow removal program:

- 1) Are you familiar with the current Snow Windrow Removal Assistance Program that is offered to residents who are 65 and older and to residents with disabilities?
- 2) Have you used the Snow Windrow Removal Assistance Program in the past?
- 3) Do you feel that snow windrow removal should be the responsibility of the local municipality or the homeowner?
- 4) Would you support a tax increase of 2.5% solely for the purpose of windrow clearing in order to provide this service to all residents within Richmond Hill?

## Appendix C- Windrow Benchmarking Survey

350

Question	Richmond Hill	Markham	Vaughan	Stouffville	King	Burlington	Toronto
1) Does your municipality offer driveway windrow removal to all households?	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes – where it is mechanically possible to do so. Streets with monolithic sidewalk, on street parking, etc. do not receive the service.
2) Does your municipality offer a driveway windrow removal program for qualifying residents? If yes, how do residents qualify for this program?	Yes. Residents that are 65 years of age or have a disability preventing them from being able to perform the activity. Required to provide proof of age or medical certificate with application.	Yes. Must be 60 years of age or older with no other able bodied person under 60 residing in the household, or by providing medical documentation that they're physically challenged and require the assistance.	n/a	Yes – All residents of the household must be 65 years of age or older or a medical note provided to the Town	Seniors Only- they must apply.	Yes- for individuals with disabilities. The program is limited to the first 150 registrants.	No
3) Does your municipality charge a fee to residents for the service so that it does not impact the tax rate? Or has your municipality ever considered this approach?	No.	No, but we have charged a nominal fee in the past.	No.	No consideration has been undertaken at this time.	No.	Yes- \$51 non-refundable fee for the entire season.	There is no fee. It has never been considered.
4) If you provide windrow service for qualified residents only, do you also offer this service to non-eligible residents for a fee?	No.	No	n/a	No	No	No	No
5) When was the windrow service program implemented?	2005	Approximately 20+ years ago.	User pay-1997 City wide- 1999	Not sure, was in place for at least the previous 8	2003	2007-2008	It has been in place since amalgamation in

# Appendix C- Windrow Benchmarking Survey

Question	Richmond Hill	Markham	Vaughan	Stouffville	King	Burlington	Toronto
				winter seasons.			1998. Prior to that, it had been in place since approx.. 1995 in Scarborough and since the 80's in North York.
6) Is the service performed by a contractor or provided in-house?	Town Staff	Contracted Service that piggy backs on the Local Road Plow contract.	Contractor	Contractor	In house.	Contractor	100% contractors
7) If the service is contracted, is there a standby cost? If yes, how much?	n/a	Yes. \$55.00/day per unit	Yes- \$1.065 million	No standby cost.	n/a	Yes/no - varies. There is an option for standby within the bid submission.	Contractors are paid a daily standby rate(ranges from \$150/day to \$250/day) and an hourly operating rate(ranges from \$150/hr to \$200/hr). There are approx.. 16 different contracts and various types of equipment are used.
8) If the service is contracted, what is the length of the contract?	n/a	7 years with a three year renewal option.	Winter Maintenance Contract- 7 years	3 seasons with possible extensions for another 2. Included with our sidewalk winter maintenance contract.	n/a	1 year contract. Contract may be extended up to 5 years	We are currently in the final year of a 2008-2015 contract and have just tendered for 2015-2022.
9) What is the total number of driveways that	Approx. 1,400	Increases steadily. Presently, over	80,000	Around 300 per season.	120	Approximately 125, with a	Approx. 252,000



## Appendix C- Windrow Benchmarking Survey

352

Question	Richmond Hill	Markham	Vaughan	Stouffville	King	Burlington	Toronto
receive the service?		3,100.				maximum of 150.	
10) What is the cost per driveway for the program?	Approx. \$45.00 per driveway per season	Approx. \$62.00 per driveway per season or \$12.50 per event (based on 5 events)	Approx. \$41.25 per driveway per season or \$8.75 per event (based on 5 events)	Approx. \$115.00 per driveway per season or \$6.85 + HST per event (based on 15 events)	n/a	\$51 (paid by the resident)	Approx. \$20 per driveway per season.
11) What is the total cost of the program?	Approx. \$64,000	Annual budget is \$119,000.00 Operating, and \$75,350.00 Standby	3 year average- \$1.3 million Add \$2M for snow removal	Estimated \$30,825 per season + HST (15 events per season x 300 driveways	n/a	Approximately \$20K - \$30K	Approx. \$5M
12) Is the program funded from the tax base (do all taxpayers pay or only those using the service)?	Tax base funded.	Tax base funded.	Tax base funded.	Tax base funded.	Tax based funded- done by staff as part of regular duties.	Cost of program is off-set by \$51 annual fee/driveway	Tax base funded.
13) What is the level of service provided (response time)?	Within 30 hours after storm has ended.	Windrows to be completed within 8 hours of their road being plowed.	16 hours from the time we activate our plows.	Within 24 hours after the end of the snow event.	After all other routes are completed.	Within 16 hours of the road being plowed. The service does not include windrows left by sidewalk plows.	It is linked to road classification. As it is part of the plowing operation, driveways are cleared within 1 – 2hrs of the road being plowed.
14) What is the cost of repairs, equipment and storage required for the program?		Borne by the contractor.	n/a	Included in contract price.	n/a	Contractor's responsibility.	The service is provided by contractors. All contracted equipment is parked in our yards. The contractor pays for all repairs, etc. out

## Appendix C- Windrow Benchmarking Survey

Question	Richmond Hill	Markham	Vaughan	Stouffville	King	Burlington	Toronto
							of their daily standby & operating rates.
15) What is the cost of fuel required for the program?		Borne by the contractor.	3 year average- \$17,000	Included in contract price.	n/a	Contractor's responsibility.	Fuel is paid by the contractor.
16) What type of equipment is used for your program and how many units are required?		Pickup truck with front plow, currently 10 units are under contract for this service.	Back hoes/tractors- 43 One with every plow in residential areas.	Pickup truck. Contractor typically has 2 or 3, but contract only requires one.	Pickup with a blade.	Contractor dependent, typically pickup-trucks.	One driveway plow is required per plow beat. We use graders, front end loaders, tractors, etc. all with an attached driveway windrow gate/blade.
17) Has your municipality ever surveyed or invited comments from residents regarding the windrow service removal program? If yes, please explain.	No but comments are received through our contact centre.	It is my understanding there was a survey undertaken quite some time ago, but have not been able to confirm this.	Yes- those that do respond appear to like the service.	No, but has briefly been discussed between some Council members and Public Works staff. No plan going forward at this time.	No.	No.	No.

Note from the City of Vaughan: Staff recommended to Council that the service be terminated however; this request was denied. Staff will be preparing a new winter maintenance contract for the November 2016 that maintains the status quo. In winters where there is large snow accumulation the City is forced to commence full street snow removal that can be attributed primarily to the windrow program. The nature of the machine tends to have the snow fall back out towards the road. With each subsequent plow the snow moves farther away from the curb causing significant narrowing of streets. In the past years the City has spent as much as \$4 million on snow removal.