



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)**

PURPOSE:

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

RECOMMENDATION(S):

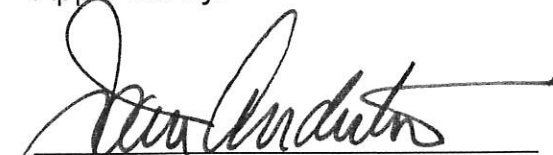
That Council receives SRCS.15.07 for consideration.

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.

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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.

