

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Community & Emergency Services Department
COMMITTEE DATE:	August 10, 2016
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	2016-2017 Snow Angel Program (CES14041(b)) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Irene Heffernan 905-546-2424 ext. 4929 Al Fletcher 905-546-2424 ext. 4711
SUBMITTED BY:	Suzanne Brown Director, Neighbourhood and Community Initiatives Community and Emergency Services Department
SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

The Emergency and Community Services Committee at its meeting of October 13, 2015 directed staff as follows:

- (a) That the current funding for the Snow Angels Program in the amount of \$100,000 be transferred from Benefit Eligibility's existing operating budget to the Neighbourhood and Community Initiatives Division;
- (b) That one temporary .5 FTE senior project manager position be hired for a three year period to:
 - (i) maintain the current level of Snow Angels service provision for the 2015 - 2016 season;
 - (ii) develop a youth skill building program aligned with the Learning Annex (Report CES15046) program for the 2016-2018 snow season; and,
- (c) That staff be directed to assess the feasibility of the investment of an honorarium to volunteers to encourage participation in the Snow Angels program and report back to the Emergency & Community Services.

Information:

In 2005, Council approved Report SPH05048/PW05152 which created a snow removal service called the Snow Angels. From 2006 - 2014 the program was co-ordinated and administered by Volunteer Hamilton with an annual budget of \$100,000.

The Snow Angels program offers a snow removal service to both low income seniors and persons with disabilities to assist with the following: snow clearing of their city

sidewalks; pathways from their sidewalks to resident doors; and the clearing of snow at the end of their driveways. Volunteers are to ensure that residents' snow is shoveled within 24 hours after a three centimetres snowfall.

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton completed a review of the Snow Angels program in 2015. While the review showed that other organizations offer low-cost alternatives to the private/for profit snow removal sector, the Snow Angels Program and Dundas Community Services were the only volunteer-driven programs to service those most vulnerable in our community. During the 10 years the Snow Angels program was administered by Volunteer Hamilton, an average of 208 clients were matched with an average of 124 volunteers annually. However, an annual average of 261 clients remained on a waitlist unmatched without volunteers. The number of snow falls over the period of time Volunteer Hamilton administered the program ranged from 9-21 snow falls per year. The City of Hamilton funded program cost to Volunteer Hamilton was \$99,000 per year (\$1000 is sub-contracted annually to Flamborough Information and Community Services).

Summary of Snow Angels Program 2015/16 snow season

In September 2015, the Snow Angels program was transferred to the Neighbourhood and Community Initiatives Division, utilizing the allocated \$100,000 and coordinated by a 0.5 FTE Senior Project Manager and a temporary program secretary for 27 weeks.

Using the same budget allocation that was provided to Volunteer Hamilton, during the 2015/16 snow season, Snow Angels matched 260 clients with 193 volunteers, and waitlisted 69 clients without volunteers. There were 13 snow fall events during the 2015/16 season requiring volunteers to be activated to shovel snow.

It should be noted that due to the tight time constraints for volunteer recruitment, and limited staff resources focussed on recruitment, staff did not undertake eligibility review of the clients. Given that staff only utilized the matched clients from 2014/15 season as well as the existing Volunteer Hamilton client waitlist (no new clients added to the list for the 2015/16 season), staff assumed Volunteer Hamilton had undertaken the eligibility review for all these potential clients to be put on the wait list and therefore focused on recruitment versus eligibility reviews.

Volunteer feedback was collected in two ways, an online survey and a comments board at a volunteer appreciation luncheon. Surveys were sent to 176 volunteers; 44 surveys were completed giving a response rate of 25%. The comments board mirrored the survey responses. Main recommendations focused on targeting families for volunteer opportunities and volunteers having contact with the clients. 31% of volunteers stated they participated in the program because they enjoyed helping others.

Volunteer feedback also stated that it is the client contact that is an incentive for people to volunteer and that they want to have more interaction with their client. As Police checks have not been a requirement of volunteers for this program, volunteers have

always been given the direction to have minimal contact with clients and to not enter their homes.

Council Direction

a) Budget

Council allocated \$100,000 to operationalize the Snow Angels program within the Neighbourhood Action Strategy. Based on the 2015/16 program, approximately \$85,000 of the \$100,000 was expended as due to a late start-up with Council direction to bring the program internally (recruitment initiated November 2015). The 2016/17 program will begin with recruitment in September and the staff salaries portion of the budget will be fully expended this season.

b) Staffing

As per Council direction, a 0.5 FTE senior project manager was hired to oversee the Snow Angels program. As the extensive recruitment and administrative work was beyond what a 0.5 FTE could manage, an existing vacant Program Secretary position was allocated to assist, filled by a temporary agency, as job descriptions were re-worked, posted and a new program secretary was hired. For the months of November to February, both staff worked almost entirely on the Snow Angels program putting other Divisional work priorities in abeyance until the end of the program. For the time period of March to April, the senior project manager time was reduced to an oversight role however the program secretary continued to administer the program until the last snow fall and organized the volunteer luncheon.

- (i) Maintain current level of Snow Angels service provision for the 2015-2106 season

As promised, all Snow Angels clients who received service in the 2014/15 season, received snow clearing service for the 2015/16 season. Given the number of volunteers recruited, additional clients from the Volunteer Hamilton wait list were also matched. No new clients were added to the wait list for the 2015/16 season.

- (ii) Develop a youth skill building program aligned with the Learning Annex program for the 2016-2018 snow seasons

The recruitment targeted youth to be volunteers for the Snow Angels program. However, this was difficult as there are no guaranteed volunteer hours due to unpredictable snow falls, and youth need forty guaranteed hours to graduate from secondary school. The Learning Annex launched in June 2016 and as youth needs emerge more fully, staff will work with community partners to review opportunities for social enterprise types of businesses that could benefit the Snow Angels program.

(c) Honorariums to Encourage Volunteers

Through a misunderstanding of the direction by Council, honorariums were offered to volunteers this year, excluding any City staff who volunteered for the Snow Angels program or volunteers that did not fulfill the role through the entire winter. 124 of the volunteers were provided \$30 honorarium for a total value of \$3,720. Given the short time to recruit volunteers, it was thought that the honorarium would be an incentive to recruit volunteers. From the feedback of the volunteers, they did not choose to sign up based on the honorarium but to help people. Based on this feedback, the honorarium is not deemed an important incentive and will not be utilized in the future.

Next Steps

A review of volunteer feedback and a program debrief was held with staff from Helping Hands program, Age Friendly Hamilton Strategy, Benefit and Eligibility Division, Recreation Division, Customer Contact Centre, Public Works, and the Neighbourhood Action Strategy to discuss options for the Snow Angels program moving forward. The following two year approach was developed by this staff team, utilizing existing resources and staffing.

Year 1:

- Attempt to match the same group of low income seniors and low income individuals with disabilities (260) as last year, however due to the unpredictable nature of volunteer dependent programming and the severity of the weather, this number cannot be guaranteed;
- Develop an eligibility screening tool for clients. As existing clients leave (due to attrition or eligibility), screen and accept new clients from wait list;
- Pursue corporate sponsors and volunteers;
- Pursue police screening for volunteers so that they can interact with clients;
- Develop and implement a more comprehensive evaluation of the program; and,
- Report back to Emergency and Community Services Committee on the results and resource requirements for enhancing the program to recruit and service new low-income seniors and people with disabilities.

Year 2:

- Based on evaluation results and Council direction, develop resource requirements and program communication plan for recruitment of new clients to the program;
- Screen new clients through the City of Hamilton call centre;
- Develop and monitor a wait list for new clients; and,
- Evaluate Year 2 and report back to Emergency and Community Services Committee on the results and a plan for program sustainability.