




CITY OF HAMILTON
HEALTHY & SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT
Ontario Works Division

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 21, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Snow Angels Program Sustainability (HSC23022(a)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Tania Amaral (905) 546-2424 ext. 4356 Erica Brimley (905) 546-2424 ext. 4815
SUBMITTED BY:	Bonnie Elder Director, Ontario Works Division Healthy & Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- (a) That Council approve the plan for the Snow Angels program with a base budget of \$111,310 to be changed from a volunteer-driven snow removal program to a subsidy-based program for qualified recipients beginning October 1, 2023 that increases annually in alignment with the City's Budget guidelines and that the General Manager of Healthy and Safe Communities Department or their designate be authorized to increase the Ontario Works Division's 2023 budgeted complement by 0.5 full-time equivalent permanent position for a Case Aide to support the delivery of the Ontario Works Snow Angels program funded through the existing annual operating budget. The new subsidy program would be funded by the existing base budget and therefore would have no impact to the levy;
- (b) That Council approve a public awareness messaging campaign to promote the idea of neighbours helping neighbours for inclusion in existing City public communications where appropriate. This would be accomplished using existing City communication resources;
- (c) That the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department or their designate be directed and authorized, on behalf of the City of Hamilton, to enter into, execute and administer all agreements and documents necessary to implement the Snow Angels program including but not limited to spending caps, benefit frequency limits or other controls necessary to ensure costs are contained within the approved budget; and,

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- (d) That staff bring forward a report to Council in June 2024 with an update on the Snow Angels subsidy program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is being provided to Council in response to Report (HSC23022) on May 4, 2023, for staff to report back on the feasibility of alternates to providing snow removal in addition to the options provided in the original report.

The current Snow Angels program is a volunteer-based snow removal service intended to match local volunteers with low-income seniors and persons with disabilities. At the December 9, 2021, Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting, Information Report (HSC21046) identified that the Snow Angels program was no longer sustainable in its current format and that the program would be reviewed.

Under the current service delivery model fewer and fewer residents are served each year by the program given the difficulty in recruiting and matching volunteers and the high level of administrative effort to coordinate.

Report HSC23022(a) summarizes alternative service delivery models and recommends moving to a subsidy program. The recommended program would provide approved residents an annual snow-season subsidy that can be used to assist with the cost of procuring snow removal services. Residents will provide proof of costs incurred to receive the subsidy. This report also recommends a periodic public awareness campaign encouraging Hamilton residents to assist those less able to clear sidewalks after a snowfall as a good and trusted neighbour, including \$1000 to support Flamborough Connects with their marketing efforts.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 5

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Recommendation (a) is requesting approval for the Snow Angels program that is funded through the Healthy and Safe Communities Ontario Works Snow Angels departmental annual operating budget as a subsidy program, in replacement of the current volunteer-based program. The current annual operating budget for the Snow Angels program reflected in Ontario Works is \$111,310. Recommendation (a) is also requesting approval for a 0.5 full-time equivalent, Ontario Works Special Supports Case Aide, to support the delivery of the program at an annual cost of \$45,344.20 to be funded by the existing base and therefore having no impact to the levy. With the current commitment to Flamborough for \$1,000 this would leave a total available subsidy for clients of \$64,965.80 throughout the winter season. An annual snow season subsidy of \$450

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per qualifying homeowner would allow for up to 144 residents to receive this benefit. Please see table one below.

Table 1: Cost Breakdown for Recommendation (a)

Number of residents	144
Staffing required	0.5 Case Aide
Staffing costs	\$45,344
Program costs	\$65,966
Total	\$111,310

Staff have used best efforts to estimate the usage of the program. Should volumes substantially exceed the expected levels, staff will report back to Council for further consideration.

Staffing: To support the delivery of the Snow Angels program a 0.5 permanent full-time equivalent, Ontario Works Special Supports Case Aide is required.

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with Report HSC23022(a).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The current Snow Angels program was created after the introduction of By-law No. 03-296, which requires homeowners to clear all snow and ice from municipal sidewalks within 24 hours after any snow or freezing rain. In December 2005, Council approved a snow removal program report (SPH05048/PW05152) known as the Snow Angels program.

As approved by Council on September 9, 2021, report HSC21026, the current Snow Angels program is for residents who are 65 years of age or older and/or for those who have a physical disability, own their home and annual net income is under the thresholds of the Low-Income Measure (after tax). They also have no other able-bodied adult living at the house.

The current Snow Angels program is a volunteer-based snow removal service that is intended to match local volunteers with low-income seniors and persons with disabilities, offering snow removal services within 24 hours after a minimum 3 cm snowfall to a resident's city sidewalk, pathway from their sidewalk to resident's door and the clearing of the windrow.

In recent years, the number of clients matched with volunteers has changed almost daily throughout the winter season due to:

- the lack of volunteers

- the loss of volunteers from injuries, conflicting commitments, and difficult working conditions (for example cold, heavy snow, large and/or corner lots)
- difficulty finding and maintaining matches based on geography (for example available volunteers aren't close to the client)
- frustration from volunteers when they attend properties and find the snow has already been cleared
- clients requiring more service mid-season, often neighbours are happy to assist at the start of the winter season but tire as the winter goes on

As a volunteer-driven program, snow removal service is not guaranteed and often not completed. When sidewalks and paths are not being cleared, seniors and persons with disabilities are left to seek other snow clearing arrangements at the last minute.

Throughout its tenure, the Snow Angels program has faced issues associated with using volunteers to deliver the service. The Program has faced challenges in recruiting volunteers, the geographical location of the volunteers, and volunteer turnover. In the last year we were only able to match 62 people or 73% of applicants with a volunteer.

As a result of extensive consultation with several City of Hamilton Departments and staff, it is our recommendation that the Snow Angels program become a subsidy-based program, where all residents who qualify have equal opportunity to apply for the subsidy to help with snow removal costs. A subsidy-based program would allow for approved residents to receive a one-time annual subsidy to help offset the cost of private snow removal and would become a benefit administered by the Low- income program within the Ontario Works Division.

Historically the Snow Angels program has funded a 0.5 full-time equivalent to assist with the delivery of the program from October to April. In recent years the 0.5 full-time equivalent was removed from the Snow Angels program, therefore there is currently no staff to assist with the delivery of the recommended program.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

None

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The following City of Hamilton Departments/Divisions and other groups have been consulted in the development of this report:

- Healthy & Safe Communities: Children & Community Services-Performance & Evaluation
- City Manager's Office: Communications

- Corporate Services: Business Administration, Procurement and Legal & Risk Management Services
- Planning & Economic Development: Licensing and By-law Services
- Public Works: Facilities Operations & Maintenance and Transportation Division
- Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton
- St. Joseph's Home Care

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Although the current Snow Angels program is volunteer-driven, it requires high administrative effort to manage the roster of volunteers and the calls and queries from residents.

Staff explored other options such as considering existing City snow removal contracts or developing a list of preferred snow removal vendors. However, in consultation, staff confirmed that a preferred vendor's list is not something that the City uses, and a preferred vendor list increases the City's liability of risk exposure.

A subsidy model would leave any issue of private property damage or negligence between the resident and their own contractor, at no additional cost to the City above the subsidy.

Through a subsidy program, we anticipate that up to 144 residents could be served based on current funding. A scan of other municipalities showed that the upper limit of several municipalities, as outlined in Appendix "A" to report HSC23022(a), who provide snow removal subsidies ranged between \$400-\$450. An annual snow season subsidy of \$450 would help alleviate the cost of snow removal, provide a sustainable and more reliable service for those most in need of assistance and remain in compliance with the City's snow and ice removal by-law.

In addition to the current Snow Angels program, there are other community-based snow removal services that residents in need can access, such as Flamborough Connects, Stoney Creek Seniors Outreach Services, St. Joseph's Home Care and a self-serve website www.snowangelscanada.ca. This website is a free, Canada-wide service that matches residents with available volunteers in their area and has been formally adopted by other cities such as Barrie, Caledon, Guelph, London, and Newmarket, as part of their snow removal service offering.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

There are four alternatives below for consideration. These alternatives provide Council with costing, staffing and legal implications based on the potential number of residents that may qualify for the program. Refer to Appendix "A" to report HSC23022(a) for a summary of the costs of all the snow removal alternatives listed below.

Alternative 1: Elimination of the Snow Angels program

Due to the reduced service levels and high administrative costs, the Snow Angels Program could be eliminated. Residents seeking snow removal assistance would be referred to other services within the community or to www.snowangelscanada.ca

Financial: Eliminating the Snow Angels program would result in a budget surplus of \$111,310 per year.

Staffing: There are no staffing implications associated with this alternative.

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with this alternative.

Alternative 2: An annual snow season subsidy for up to 250 residents

Council could consider a subsidy-based program for up to 250 qualified residents. These residents would obtain the service through their own arrangements and submit proof of costs incurred until the subsidy is exhausted. This alternative alleviates any City risk arising from property damage and negligence.

Financial: This alternative would require an additional levy budget of \$91,878 in addition to the existing Snow Angels base budget of \$111,310 for a total of \$203,188. Please refer to Appendix "A" for cost breakdown.

Staffing: Should Council approve 250 residents; this alternative would require an additional staffing complement of 1.0 full-time equivalent of an Ontario Works Special Supports Case Aide at a cost of \$90,688.

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with this alternative.

Alternative 3: City snow removal with Public Works-Transportation Division

The City could provide snow removal for residents that qualify for the Snow Angels program. Eligibility would be determined by an Ontario Works Case Aide. This alternative would require a significant budget increase for equipment, recruiting & training employees, and coordination at a cost of \$3,223,329 dollars for 250 residents per year. Allowing the use of City equipment to remove snow on private property has some potential City liability risk exposure. The implementation of this alternative could not take place until the 2025/2026 winter season at the earliest due to procurement of additional equipment and recruitment of staff.

Financial: This alternative would require an additional levy budget of up to \$3,112,019 in addition to the existing Snow Angels base budget of

\$111,310 for a total of \$3,223,329. This alternative would require a transfer of base budget in the amount of \$111,310 from Healthy and Safe Communities to the Public Works-Transportation Division. Please refer to Appendix "A" for cost breakdown.

Staffing: This alternative would require an additional staffing complement of 34 full-time equivalent staff at a cost of \$2,796,567.

Legal: Liability issues have been identified as a risk by Legal and Risk Management Services in the event of defective equipment, property damage, or bodily damage.

Alternative 4: Procurement tendering of contract through Public Works- Facilities Operations and Maintenance

The City could contract for snow removal for residents that qualify for the Snow Angels Program. There would need to be a tender request completed through Procurement. In consultation with City departments, staff were advised that finding interested contractors for snow clearing who are willing to take on private property contracts would be challenging due to the significant increases with insurance liability costs in the event of damages and /or personal injury. This alternative could not be implemented until the 2024/2025 winter season due to the timelines required for a tender process.

Financial: This alternative would require an additional levy budget of up to \$425,575 in addition to the existing Snow Angels base budget of \$111,310 for a total of \$536,885. Please refer to Appendix "A" for cost breakdown.

Staffing: This alternative would require an additional staffing complement of up to 1.5 full-time equivalent staff at a cost of \$132,229.

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with this alternative.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report HSC23022(a): Summary of Snow Removal Alternatives

Appendix "B" to Report HSC23022(a): Snow Removal Programs Municipal Scan

Appendix "C" to Report HSC23022(a): Matched and Unmatched Residents by Ward