




Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 19, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Snow Angels Program Update (HSC23022(b)) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Erica Brimley 905-546-2424 ext. 4815
SUBMITTED BY:	Stuart Beumer Director, Ontario Works Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

At their meeting September 21, 2023, Council approved the following motion:

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

INFORMATION

This information report provides the annual update requested by Council on the Snow Angels subsidy program for the 2023/2024 winter snow clearing season. The Snow Angels volunteer program was created in December 2005 (SPH05048/PW05152) 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 the Snow Angels Program Sustainability HSC23022(a) report that considered the ongoing sustainability and effectiveness of the program and various operating models in light of declining volunteerism. A subsidy model was recommended to minimize risk and liability to the city as any issues related to service, private property damage, or liability between the resident and their selected provider.

On September 21, 2023, the City Council approved transitioning the Snow Angels program from a volunteer-based initiative to a snow clearing subsidy. The subsidy, now referred to as the snow clearing subsidy to better reflect this change, has been allocated a base budget of \$111,310, which includes staffing and administrative costs and funds to support up to 144 qualifying homeowners with up to a \$450 snow clearing subsidy for the winter season.

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Ontario Works promotes the snow clearing benefit in the Licensing and By-law Services Division's Snow off Sidewalk (SOS) brochure, the City of Hamilton website, and through Flamborough Connects.

To be eligible for the program, residents must meet the following criteria:

- 65 years of age or older and/or have a physical disability,
- own their home,
- have no other able-bodied adult living in the home, and;
- for individuals not in receipt of social assistance, who meet the annual net income threshold based on Stats Canada Low-Income Measure approved by Council on September 9, 2021 (HSC21026).

Eligible applicants can receive an upfront payment of \$225 to a maximum subsidy of \$450 per winter season.

2023-2024 Winter Season

The 2023-2024 winter season experienced a lower-than-expected demand, likely due to mild weather conditions. Public Works reported only four snow events with 3 cm of snow or greater, which resulted in the forecasted support for potentially 144 households not being met.

The 2023-2024 winter season data indicates there were 67 household applications. Due to income in excess, duplicate applications, or failure to meet eligibility criteria (such as owning a home or missing information), 35% of the applications were deemed ineligible. The remaining 44 applications were approved and received one upfront payment of \$225, and one household received both the first and second payment of \$225 for total of \$450.

Data from the 44 approved applicants revealed the following:

- A total of \$10,125 (\$8,550 in 2023 and \$1,575 in 2024) was issued to participants from November 2023 to March 2024
- 52% resided in the lower city (Wards 1 to 5), approximately 48% were in upper city (Wards 6-8 and 14-15)
- 86% of eligible applicants were 65 years or older
- 14% were Ontario Disability Support Program applicants and 86% were low-income applicants
- 71% were single

A condition of eligibility was the requirement to submit a snow clearing expense log sheet by April 30, 2024; 33 applicants followed through on this requirement and 11 applicants failed to comply with this requirement. Reminder letters were mailed in May 2024 and reminder calls made in June 2024. Applicants who do not submit the snow clearing expense log sheet will not be eligible for future snow clearing benefits.

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Staff contacted organizations offering similar programs in the City of Hamilton for information on uptake in their programs this past winter and found the following:

- Flamborough Connects: Volunteer Snow Angels Program was not able to match all their families with volunteers. They supported eight households with six volunteers and had three households on wait list.
- Stoney Creek Outreach Services: Volunteer senior snow program was not able to match all their seniors with volunteers. They supported 105 seniors with 12 volunteers and had 60 on a waitlist.
- St. Joseph Home Care Snow Removal Program: This program was not available last winter because they couldn't retain contractors. Normally, eligible applicants pay a discounted fee for snow removal services directly to the contractor.

The Snow Angels Program had a Council approved 2023 operating budget of \$111,310. After deducting staffing and program costs of \$66,435 including \$1,000 allocated to Flamborough Connects, and subsidies provided to eligible individuals, there was a program surplus of \$44,875 in 2023, which was included in the preliminary 2023 year-end Operating Budget Variance Report (FCS23063(b)) as presented to the Audit, Finance and Administration Committee on June 6, 2024. The City's 2023 financial results are still subject to finalization of the 2023 audited financial statements.

2023/2024 Snow Clearing Subsidy Benefit Survey

A snow clearing subsidy benefit survey was developed to collect feedback from eligible recipients for the 2023/2024 winter season. The feedback will be used to help understand the subsidy arrangements and experience for recipients and assist with future planning (Appendix "A" to Report HSC23022(b)).

Key Survey Results Summary:

There were 26 surveys completed with a 59% response rate. The survey feedback from respondents showed that:

- 96% respondents stated they would recommend the snow clearing subsidy to others. The received funds assisted to hire help, reduced financial burdens, allowed them to get out to do things safely and reduced the stress/concerns of having to shovel due to their age/medical condition
- Approximately 58% of respondents indicated it was easy/very easy to find someone to help with clearing snow after receiving the subsidy
- Almost two-thirds of recipients indicated that the contractor or person came the same day as the snow event to clear their snow. As a result, they had no difficulties meeting the City of Hamilton by-law requirement to clear snow within 48 hours and did not receive a by-law infraction or notification to clear snow from their property

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- Other suggestions received through the survey include providing a list of people or contractors who offer snow removal services, and a summer grass/lawn maintenance benefit

2024-2025 Winter Season

The snow clearing subsidy benefit will continue for the 2024-2025 winter season. Households can apply from November 1, 2024, to March 30, 2025.

The 2024 budget can support 144 eligible applicants with subsidies up to \$450 for the winter season. Several factors can influence application volumes and our ability to support all eligible households, including the number of snow event days, changing economic conditions and the ability of low-income households to manage their expenses, and general awareness of the benefit.

Applicants who fail to provide their expense log will not be eligible for any further subsidy until they provide their completed snow clearing expense log form and those that did not spend their full subsidy will only receive the difference up to \$450. In addition to the snow clearing subsidy, staff will continue to promote Snow Angels Canada at www.snowangelscanada.ca. This free, Canada-wide service matches residents with available volunteers in their area and has been formally adopted by other cities as part of their snow removal service offering.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Report HSC23022(b): 2023/2024 Snow Clearing Subsidy Benefit Survey Summary