

Staff Report 2024-0044

Meeting Date: July 9, 2024

Subject: Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program

Submitted By: Katie Sawyers, Coordinator, Age-Friendly; Community and Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

That staff be directed to update the Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program as outlined in Staff Report 2024-0044; and

That Council approve an annual budget of \$150,000 starting January 2025 to fund the sustainability of the grant program as outlined in Staff Report 2024-0044.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In September 2022, the Town of Caledon launched the Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program to residents based on financial eligibility criteria to support older adults and individuals with a physical disability with snow removal challenges.
- Council requested that the funds provided through this program increase from \$350 to \$500 during the 2023 budget discussions, effective October 2023.
- At the November 14, 2023 Council meeting, Council approved expansion of the Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program to include residents aged 75+ regardless of income with an annual expanded budget of \$50,000 for a total of \$125,000 for the program starting in 2025.
- With expansion of the program, the number of applications received from October to December 2023 exceeded the allocated budget for the program by \$49,400.
- Staff recommend modifying the program to align with the Town's fiscal year starting 2025 and update the program to include additional program criteria to maximize sustainability and impact for residents.

BACKGROUND

Support for Aging in Place

One of the largest challenges for older residents to age in place is the costs to maintain the outdoor areas of their home when they no longer are physically able to do so. This includes snow removal, grass cutting, leaf raking, and general outdoor maintenance. Unkept homes can cause safety issues for not only the resident but for any services or businesses visiting the home. Things like unplowed driveways increase risks of slips and falls during the wintertime. Unkept and overgrown grass and weeds can provide cover for insects and parasites that can carry harmful diseases such as ticks and mosquitoes. Additionally, unkept properties can pose a potential fire hazard and potentially start or spread fires during the dry heat of the summer months.

In Caledon, the population of older adults aged 65+ is close to 17% of the total estimated population of 83,266. This number is expected to increase over the next ten years as the population ages and the Town grows. Many of these residents reside in detached homes with some amount of property to maintain and an average two car driveway.



The Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program

The Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program was developed and launched in September 2022. The program was designed to support aging in place for high need residents by providing financial support for snow clearing. The program is a financial grant offering \$350 for qualified low-income residents aged 65+ receiving GIS (Guaranteed Income Support) and persons with a physical disability receiving ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program). This program launched September 2022 and ran until March 2023 with approximately ninety-three (93) applicants.

During the 2023 budget discussions, Council increased the grant from \$350 to \$500 per qualified applicant effective October 2023 for the 2023/2024 season of the program. In November 2023, a Council supported motion expanded the eligibility of the Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program to include residents aged 75+ regardless of income to increase support for older residents living in Caledon to age in place.

To promote the program changes and increase awareness, a communications campaign directing the public to apply online at caledon.ca/adult55 or by calling 311 was developed. The campaign was shared online on the caledon.ca/adult55 webpage, through email outreach, internal TV screens and printed posters at Town facilities, the Town's social media avenues, with community partners, the Town's weekly newspaper page and inclusion in both the Town's and Age-Friendly Caledon's eNewsletter from September 2023 to March 2024.

DISCUSSION

Upon expansion of the Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program on November 30, 2023 (to include residents aged 75+ regardless of income), resident applications more than doubled from the previous 2022/2023 winter season (91 successful applicants in 2022/23). With this expansion, staff have received feedback about the program including questions about returning unused funds (the winter of 2023/2024 was quite mild) and clarifying if the unused money could be used to pay for additional seasonal supports such as lawn care and outdoor maintenance.

Taking this feedback into consideration and anticipating increasingly mild winters with occasional winter storms due to global warming and environmental impacts, staff reviewed the program and are suggesting it should be expanded to include year-round maintenance supports based on resident needs for age in place.

By modifying the program, the Town can expect increased safety and satisfaction of residents eligible for funding and potentially a decrease in the number of by-laws calls for unkept and unmaintained properties during the summer months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the program continues to gain interest from the public, staff recommend the following changes for sustainability and consistency to the current Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program proposed to take effect starting January 2025:

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- Conduct an internal review of the application process and review program synergies with the Town's Older Adult (65+) or Persons with Disabilities Tax Assistance Application and investigate merging the application forms to further streamline the process and ensure consistency and efficiency for all individuals applying.
- That the current program is not continued for the remainder of the 2024 fiscal year to allow for updates and changes.
- Update the program's application timelines to align with the Town's Financial fiscal year (January to December) starting January 2025.
- Request an annualized budget funding line for this program with an annual budget of \$150,000 per year starting in January 2025.

Modify the existing program to incorporate a lawn/property support component allowing the resident to further support residents ability to maintain their home and continue to age in place.

- Request that starting 2026 the amount provided per annum is reviewed based on cost of living and program interested, for continued and ongoing support.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Snow Removal Financial Assistance Program's annual operating budget is \$75,000. With the expansion of the program to include residents aged 75+, together with the increase in the grant, this amount was insufficient to meet the demand from the community in 2023. This resulted in the grants issued exceeding the budget by \$49,400. In a staff report on November 14, 2023 staff recommended that additional funds, of up to \$50,000, be funded from the tax funded operating contingency reserve, if the program exceeds budget.

Please see the following chart for an overview of the number of applicants and funds provided via this program.

Fiscal Year	2022 (Sep – Dec)	2023	2024 (Jan - Mar)
Number of Successful Applicants	27	268 (64 - Jan – Mar / 204 - Oct – Dec)	93
Budget	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Total \$ Amount of Grants Issued	\$9,450	\$124,400	\$46,500
Budget Variance	\$65,550	(\$49,400)	\$28,500

Pending Council approval, the 2025 budget will include \$150,000 for the revised program.

COUNCIL WORK PLAN

Strategic Plan 2023-2035

This report is directly related to the following priority in Caledon's 2023-2035 Strategic Plan:



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Community Vitality and Livability

- Caledon offers services and programs that support a healthy, caring, engaged and inclusive community

Details about Caledon's 2023-2035 Strategic Plan can be found at caledon.ca/strategicplan.

ATTACHMENTS

None.