



Town of Huntsville Staff Report

Meeting Date: January 28, 2026

To: General Committee

Report Number: OPS-2026-5

Confidential: No

Author(s): Brandon Hall, David Zilkey,

Subject: Update on Road Salt Usage and Financial Support of Reduction Initiatives

Report Highlights

As previously directed by Committee, staff have reviewed the SALT YMuskoka project and their request for financial support for their road salt reduction initiatives. This report provides a high-level summary of the Town of Huntsville's current road salt use practices and their alignment with provincial minimum maintenance standards. The recommended motion commits to reviewing these policies with the goal of reducing salt usage as much as possible. Further, staff are recommending that Friends of the Muskoka Watershed be advised to apply to the Town's community program and that staff be directed to assist in the process if needed.

Recommendation

WHEREAS: salt pollution negatively affects freshwater environments;

AND WHEREAS: the Town of Huntsville uses road salt to meet its winter road and sidewalk maintenance obligations;

NOW THEREFORE, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT: staff be directed to review the Town's road salt usage policies to ensure compliance with minimum maintenance standards while reducing salt use as much as possible;

AND FURTHER THAT: a sand storage structure be included in the Operations Centre Redevelopment Project;

AND FURTHER THAT: staff be directed to advise Friends of the Muskoka Watershed to apply for funding for the SALT YMuskoka project through the Town's community grant program and assist in their application if needed.

Background

Freshwater lakes and rivers are sensitive ecosystems that are threatened by several contaminants and pollutants, one of which is chloride. Chloride is introduced to freshwaters from road salting, both from public (e.g., highway road salting and sidewalk de-icing) and private applications (e.g., driveway/walkway de-icing).

As chloride concentrations rise, the health of aquatic plants and animals, roadside vegetation, and drinking water supplies is threatened. Once road salt is applied to a surface, little can be done to avoid its eventual arrival in streams, rivers, or lakes; traditional plant buffers designed to prevent contaminants from entering freshwaters are not effective at removing chloride ions from runoff. Therefore, in order to protect freshwater ecosystems, it is important to limit the application of salt wherever possible.

General Committee received a deputation from Friends of the Muskoka Watershed (FOTMW) on October 26, 2025, about road salt usage in the Muskoka region. Staff were directed by committee to review their project (SALTYMuskoka) and report back with a Town of Huntsville motion with regard to road salt usage and the request for financial support to FOTMW (Resolution No. GC94-25).

Discussion

Assessing the role of salt in road maintenance

Ontario Regulation 239/02 made under the Municipal Act requires municipalities to meet minimum maintenance standards for municipal highways. With respect to ice formation, section 5 subsection (4) requires municipalities to treat icy roadways by applying material including but not limited to salt, sand, or any combination of salt and sand. The Town is aware of the need to limit its salt usage and currently uses a mix of salt (5%) and sand (95%) to treat the majority of its roadways. However, there are select roadways that require 100% salt application for de-icing based on their steep topography. In an effort to avoid excessive salt usage, Town of Huntsville winter maintenance vehicles are calibrated to disperse de-icing materials at a specific rate. The rate of dispersal depends on the type of road surface, topography, and vehicle speed. Winter maintenance vehicle dispersal systems are calibrated once per month during the winter season to reduce the likelihood of excessive salt application. In the spring, Town operations staff clean roadside basins, sweep leftover de-icing materials off the road, and return this material to the Town's maintenance yard for disposal away from freshwaters. Staff internally track the amount of salt applied in Huntsville over the winter maintenance season.

It is possible to reduce the amount of road salt used while still meeting the Town's obligation of minimum maintenance standards. If the Town's sand pile were to be stored in a covered facility, the concentration of salt could be reduced to 3%, which would save an estimated 300 tonnes of road salt annually. Indoor sand storage also has the benefit of preventing de-mixing of salt/sand during winter rain events, which makes sand more difficult to distribute onto roads and reduces the effectiveness of winter road maintenance. Winter rain events are happening more frequently due to climate change and will continue to affect the Town's ability to maintain the integrity of its sand pile moving forward. The construction of a sand storage structure is in the capital forecast planned to be completed as part of a new operations center building. This structure will cost an estimated \$1,520,000, a portion of which is eligible to be funded through the development charges (approximately \$380,000) and Salt Management reserve (\$115,000). A sand storage structure would reduce the Town's annual salt use by an estimated 300 tonnes and save \$33,900 per year.

Financial support of Friends of the Muskoka Watershed

Representatives of the SALTYMuskoka project requested \$5,000 from the Town of Huntsville to support their project operating expenses. SALTYMuskoka is an initiative to curb excessive road salt use and reduce salt pollution across Muskoka through advocacy, education, and citizen science. There is no funding available to support this initiative in the 2026 budget, though staff could include it for 2027 Draft Mayor's budget for consideration with Committee direction. However, the Town of Huntsville currently provides funding for events and projects that provide benefits to the community through its Community Grants program. This is one-time funding covering 50% of expenses, up to a total of \$1,500; FOTMW or other environmentally focused organizations are eligible to apply. Costs must be attributed to a specific community event or program, rather than ongoing operating or administrative expenses.

In the future, Council could also consider creating and funding an environment specific grant program with a single intake deadline that FOTMW and other organizations could apply. This has the advantage of being standardized and streamlined and would allow staff and Council to equitably consider funding requests from all community environmental groups seeking financial assistance. Other area municipalities have similar programs, such as the [Environmental Projects Grant administered by the Township of Lake of Bays](#). As

development of a similar program would require significant staff resources and this type of program was not identified in the Strategic Plan, this is something that could be explored in the next term of Council.

Options

1. Committee directs staff to review and report back on the Town's salt usage policies, include a salt/sand storage structure in the Operations Centre Redevelopment project and assist Friends of the Muskoka Watershed in applying for the Town's community grant program **(recommended)**
2. Committee directs staff to include \$5000 for FOTMW in the 2027 draft budget. **(not recommended)**
3. Committee directs staff to investigate options for establishing an Environmental Grant and report back **(not recommended)**
4. Committee directs staff to investigate additional strategies to reduce salt usage and report back **(not recommended)**

Capital

Cost to construct a sand dome is approximately **\$1,600,000**.

Operational

There would be approximately **\$30,000** in operational savings for 300 tonnes of salt reduction, if a sand dome were to be constructed.

Relevant Policies / Legislation / Resolutions

Ontario Regulation 239/02

General Committee Resolution No. GC94-25

Council Strategic Direction

- Balanced Growth-3.1: Explore opportunities to enhance construction and maintenance of our roads through improved practices.
- Protected Natural Environment-2.2: Continue implementation of the Town's Climate Adaptation Plan.
- Town's Mission: Delivering quality services for the people of Huntsville through responsible decision-making.

Respectfully Submitted: Brandon Hall, David Zilkey,

Manager Approval (if required): _____

Director Approval: Kirstin Maxwell, Director of Development Services

CAO Approval: Denise Corry, Chief Administrative Officer