



**City of Kingston  
Report to Council  
Report Number 26-126**

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**To:** Mayor and Members of Council  
**From:** Lanie Hurdle, Chief Administrative Officer  
**Resource Staff:** None  
**Date of Meeting:** April 21, 2026  
**Subject:** Municipal Residential Air Conditioner Assistance Program

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**Council Strategic Plan Alignment:**

Theme: Council requests

Goal: See above

**Executive Summary:**

On March 10, 2026, Council endorsed a motion directing staff to research options on a potential residential air conditioner program and report back to Council before the end of April 2026. This report provides information on existing Ontario municipal programs and options to consider for a City of Kingston pilot program.

**Recommendation:**

**That Council consider and give direction on one of the following options:**

**Option1:**

**That** Council receive this report for information and direct staff to continue to monitor and report back in a year on the implementation of existing municipal residential air-conditioner unit assistance programs in other jurisdictions; or

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**Option 2:**

**That** Council approve \$17,000 from the Environmental Reserve Fund to implement a residential air-conditioner pilot program with program parameters described in Report Number 26-126 and direct staff to implement this pilot program and report back in 2027 with an assessment of its outcomes.

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**Authorizing Signatures:**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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**Lanie Hurdle, Chief  
Administrative Officer**

**Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:**

Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Growth & Development Services

Jennifer Campbell, Commissioner, Community Services

Neil Carbone, Commissioner, Corporate & Emergency Services p.p.

David Fell, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston Not required

Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer p.p.

Jenna Morley, City Solicitor Not required

Ian Semple, Commissioner, Transportation & Infrastructure Services Not required

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**Options/Discussion:****Background**

On March 10, 2026, Council endorsed the following motion:

**Whereas** the community has raised concerns over heat response and addressing residential needs for the most vulnerable, specifically for residents with medical conditions; and

**Whereas** City Council has directed staff to develop a heat response plan which encourages the establishment of a “cooling room” within buildings but will not include requirements for property owners to provide air conditioning units within residential units; and

**Whereas** some communities, such as the City of Toronto and Hamilton, have run programs to provide free portable residential air conditioners to low-income persons with health-related conditions; and

**Whereas** establishing a program requires an administrator such as a Public Health Unit who can provide the eligibility and manage the funding allocation to residents in order to facilitate the acquisition of residential air conditioning units;

**Therefore Be It Resolved** That Council direct staff to review best practices such as the City of Toronto and Hamilton, consult with the Southeast Public Health Unit, and report back to Council by the end of April 2026 on options for a residential air conditioning unit program that would support vulnerable individuals with medical conditions within the City of Kingston.

**Analysis**

In order to meet the reporting deadline, staff focused research on Ontario municipalities - although staff recognize that British Columbia appears to have various by-laws and programs to support and enforce residential cooling programs to address impacts of extreme heat, especially on vulnerable populations. A number of communities have developed extreme heat relief strategies/plans to address climate change and the reality that communities are experiencing more frequent extreme heat. The City of Kingston is still working through its extreme heat strategy/plan and the interim strategy for summer 2026 will be presented to Council in June.

Based on staff research, it was identified that there are three municipalities currently providing support for residential air conditioner assistance to low-income individuals while some additional municipalities seem to be in the process of reviewing the options for such a program. Municipal

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programs currently operating appear to be supported primarily through Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disabilities Support Program (ODSP) alignments.

### **City of Toronto - Air Conditioner Assistance Program and Social Assistance/Hardship Fund**

The City of Toronto has two programs supporting the acquisition of air-conditioner units for low-income individuals. The Social Assistance/Hardship Fund is focused on OW and ODSP clients while the Air Conditioner Assistance Program is applied to low-income residents in general.

#### **Air Conditioner Assistance Program**

The City of Toronto piloted its Air Conditioner Assistance Program in 2025 which targeted low-income seniors only. This pilot aligned with the City of Toronto Heat Relief Strategy. In 2026, the City of Toronto is expanding the program to include pregnant women as well as parents/guardians of infants. The two program streams and their criteria are identified below:

##### Stream 1: Seniors

- o Applicants must be aged 65 or older
- o Applicants must have a self-identified medical need for air conditioning - no doctor's note required

##### Stream 2: Pregnant women and parent or guardian of Infants

- o Applicants must be pregnant
- o Applicants must be the parent or legal guardian of an infant under 1 year old at the time of application

The City of Toronto does not require proof of medical condition for seniors, so applicants must self-identify their conditions. The intent of removing this requirement was to reduce barriers to access. The City of Toronto does require pregnant individual/parent or guardian of infant documentation, through a healthcare professional. Applicants to both program streams must be low-income residents living in multi-unit residential buildings without access to in-suite cooling mechanisms. The low-income household is based on Statistics Canada Low Income measure and proof of income is required. Applicants can submit their applications during April and are selected through a randomized draw.

The program is administered through the City of Toronto's Human Services and Integration group in its Social Development Division, and is not administered through Toronto Public Health. The City of Toronto bulk purchases the portable air conditioner units and distribute them at no cost to eligible applicants. In 2025, the City of Toronto received 1,450 eligible applications and distributed 500 units and is planning on distributing 1,300 units in 2026 as part of the expanded program.

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Through its bulk purchase, the City pays approximately \$450 per unit. Based on this amount, the total 2026 budget is estimated is at \$635,000, including \$585,000 for units plus \$50,000 for marketing. This is financed by the City and private donations.

The distribution and installation of air conditioning units is completed through the vendor. Post-installation support is also handled with the vendor. Participants in the program are given the vendor's number for installation, delivery, warranty and repair.

The City of Toronto does not monitor long term ownership and use of these units but does keep track of applicants and distribution. The program ensures that the same applicant cannot receive a unit within a 5-year period.

The City of Toronto asks that residents advise their landlords of the air conditioner unit before installation but there is no formal agreement or approval required from landlords. The City does not cover additional utility costs as a result of the operation of an air conditioning unit.

### **Social Assistance/Hardship Fund**

Toronto residents that are not eligible for or selected through the City's Air Conditioner Assistance Program and need a cooling device for medical reasons, can also apply for funding towards a cooling device through social assistance (Ontario Works/Ontario Disability Support Program) or the City's Hardship Fund. This program does require a prescription from a physician or nurse practitioner with a diagnosis indicating that a cooling device is required to control the room temperature/humidity as part of a treatment plan, and that failing to provide this care would result in a hospitalization or severe risk to life.

The Hardship Fund provides funding for one air conditioning unit or portable fan per family, up to a maximum amount, every four years including any associated expenses (i.e. installation charges, transportation and delivery fees and all applicable taxes).

### **City of Hamilton - Special Supports Air Conditioner Subsidy**

In 2024, the City of Hamilton approved a temporary expansion of the Special Supports Air Conditioner Subsidy to all eligible low-income residents that meet the Statistics Canada Low Income Measure (LIM-AT) threshold. This subsidy, funded provincially under the discretionary health related benefits program, was previously only available to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program clients. The 2023 program data indicates that 94 unique households requested the air conditioning benefit, and 58 air-conditioning benefits were approved and provided to eligible individuals on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program.

The intent of this subsidy program is to assist eligible individuals who have a severe medical condition and where, without an air-conditioner, the symptoms of the medical condition are likely to deteriorate, increase, become episodic or cause hospitalization. Eligible applicants receive a one-time \$350 financial subsidy to purchase an air conditioner per household to assist with

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cooling an area within their residence. This one-time benefit is to be used for the medically intended purpose of purchasing an air conditioner. The assistance is based on the 2023 approximate cost of an 5,000-8,000 British Thermal Unit (BTU) air conditioner unit of the kind commonly available at retail outlets; however, it does not allow for additional related costs such as utilities, installation, and storage.

In 2024, the number of approved air conditioner subsidies for OW and ODSP clients saw an increase with 133 eligible households receiving support representing a 129% increase from 2023. The applications and approvals from non-OW and ODSP low-income households were much lower, with only seven households qualifying for the air conditioner benefit. Given the limited uptake from low-income households, the City of Hamilton determined that the Ontario Works budget could absorb the cost to expand the eligibility.

In 2025, the City of Hamilton committed to the permanent expansion of its residential air conditioner unit subsidy program to all low-income individuals access based on the Statistics Canada Low Income Measure. Through this process, the City of Hamilton also approved a limit of 50 household subsidies to be allocated in 2025 to eligible households who must provide proof of income and medical documentation from a health care provider. The documentation must confirm that, without an air conditioner, the symptoms of the condition are likely to worsen, become episodic, or result in hospitalization. The subsidy is provided on a first come, first serve basis.

The City of Hamilton asks that residents advise their landlords of the air conditioner unit but there is no formal agreement or approval required from landlords. The City does not monitor long-term ownership or use. This residential air conditioner subsidy program is part of the Hamilton Heat Strategy.

### **City of Peterborough – Air Conditioner Assistance Program**

In June of 2025, the City of Peterborough announced that it may provide financial support up to \$300 for eligible residents who receive either Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program to aid in the purchase of an air conditioning unit. Applicants are responsible for the purchase and installation of their units.

The City of Peterborough program requires that applicants be diagnosed with a severe medical respiratory condition or diagnosed severe asthma and must submit a copy of medical current condition. Applicants must submit at least one estimate for the purchase of an air conditioning unit. Metrics on the use of this program are not yet available.

### **City of Kingston Pilot Program**

City staff have reviewed the programs listed in this report and taken into consideration local programs and partnerships that could support a pilot program in 2026. Recognizing that this

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program would need to be implemented quickly as extreme heat events are anticipated to start in June of this year, staff are proposing the following 2026 pilot program parameters should council wish to proceed.

1. **Program Support** – City proceeds with a bulk purchase of air-conditioner units that are provided for free on a first come, first serve basis to eligible applicants. City staff believe that the City may be able to obtain units at a lower cost through a bulk purchase the one-off purchases made by program participants. Bulk purchased units would also create equity across the program on the units being provided and could be distributed efficiently once secured. It is expected that the cost of a unit will be in the range of \$400-\$500 for a 10,000 BTU which can cool a space of approximately 450 square feet. With a proposed one-time budget of \$17,000 from the Environmental Reserve Fund, it is anticipated that this will enable the distribution of about 35 units. United Way has confirmed that its volunteers can support the distribution and installation of these units. This will reduce barriers to acquire and install the air conditioner units.
2. **Program Eligibility** – The Program would be administered through the City of Kingston Municipal Fee Assistance Program (MFAP) which already completes income and special needs review. Eligible applicants must meet the following criteria:
  - Must be age 65 or older;
  - Must be a resident of the City of Kingston;
  - Must be a low-income resident that meets the Statistics Canada after-tax Low-Income Measure (LIM) plus 15 percent;
  - Must reside within a multi-residential unit;
  - For the pilot program, applicants would be asked to self-declare if they were advised by a medical professional to acquire an air conditioner to address an existing medical condition.

If Council were to support moving beyond the pilot program, staff would work to incorporate medical documentation as an eligibility requirement of the program. This would be similar to the approach currently taken in accessing Kingston Access Bus services as well as the subsidized accessible taxi program.

3. **Program Follow-Ups** – City staff would track recipients of air-conditioner units and would complete an evaluation within a year to obtain information/data on impact of this program. This would be reported to Council as part of the MFAP report.

City staff recognize that this pilot program would be limited to a smaller group of residents but in understanding that the need will be greater than the availability are therefore trying to put parameters in place that will support those with greatest needs, in two of the highest risk categories, older adults and those facing significant financial barriers. Should Council proceed

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with such a program, it would be taken into consideration with the City’s Extreme Heat Plan which will be brought forward later in 2026.

**Public Engagement**

Due to the limited time frame in reporting back to Council, City staff consulted Public Health, United Way, KFL&A, and Seniors for Climate Action Now! (SCAN).

**Climate Risk Considerations**

Not applicable.

**Indigenization, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IIDEA) Considerations**

The pilot program would support low-income seniors with medical conditions.

**Existing Policy/By-Law**

Not applicable.

**Notice Provisions**

Not applicable

**Financial Considerations**

It is recommended that \$17,000 from the Environment Reserve Fund be considered should Council wish to support the implementation of a residential air-conditioner assistance pilot program in 2026. There is sufficient funding in the Environment Reserve Fund to support this investment.

**Contacts:**

Lanie Hurdle, Chief Administrative Officer, 613-546-4291 extension 1231

**Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:**

None

**Exhibits Attached:**

None