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## Snow budget boost sought

By RENATO GANDIA, CALGARY SUN

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Blowing the city's snow and ice removal budget 18 years out of 20 is enough to show an increase is needed now, say aldermen.

Ald. Ray Jones said he's anticipating a snow removal audit expected to begin next week will recommend additional cash, between \$6 million and \$10 million, to cover the cost of keeping city streets safe and passable.

The city's roads department has been taking cash from other programs, but officials didn't identify which, to pay for the shortfall on snow and ice removal.

In 2009, the snow budget rose more than \$7 million, from \$24 million to \$31 million. Jones said it's bad that administration has to cut funding from other programs to pay for excess expenditures in snow and ice control.

"It looks like everything is hunky dory when it's not because we're losing in other areas as well," he said.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, chairman of Land Use, Planning and Transportation committee, said the shortfall nears \$10 million already, adding the close to \$2 million in expenditures from the beginning of the year up to April 30 and the 2009 overage.

"We can no longer rely on chinooks to pull us out of this problem," she said.

Colley-Urquhart said adding \$10 million to the total city budget means 1% property tax increase. "We're nearly at \$33 million a year in snow removal and that can take up about 3% tax increase," she said.

In 2009, \$2 million was withdrawn from the Fiscal Stability Reserve Fund to add to the snow budget.

But the city couldn't keep dipping from that reserve, said aldermen.

Meanwhile, the same committee endorsed administration's recommendation to continue educating the public on the benefit of winter tire use. Council asked administration to look into the possibility of giving car owners a cash incentive for putting on winter tires, but that program would wind up costing as much as \$66 million, based on 660,000 registered vehicles in the Calgary area.

The city is looking into a pilot project on winter tire use for 853 city-owned cars and trucks and that's estimated to cost \$1.17 million, excluding replacement of used tires thereafter.

City cops experimented with winter tires on 50 cruisers, but it's not immediately clear if the program will continue.

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