

Waste Utility Affordability Program

Final Engagement Report
October 24, 2022



Engagement Summary

The City of Saskatoon (City) is exploring options to support low-income residents with the addition of curbside garbage and organics collections to the waste utility. Many cities across Canada have found that charging a fee for waste based on volume (i.e., cart size) works to reduce landfill waste, address the impacts of climate change, and encourage better waste habits within the community. However, the ability for low-income and fixed-income residents to pay the new waste utility was identified as a concern during 2018 [public engagement activities about concerning changes to waste management in Saskatoon](#). As a result, in October 2021 when the change to a waste utility was approved, City Council resolved, “*that the Administration proceed with waste utility affordability program development focusing on a transitional approach, reporting back by Q3, 2022.*” Therefore, the City is exploring options to support low-income residents to address these concerns and ensure the benefits of a waste utility are realized through the [Waste Utility Affordability Program](#).

From June to August 2022, City Administration engaged with community organizations in the development of the Waste Utility Affordability Program. Based on what we heard, in addition to best practise research and internal considerations, City Administration has developed program options which will be presented to City Council in Fall 2022.

During the development of the program, the City engaged community organizations in identifying options that may work in Saskatoon and program elements that enhance opportunities and mitigate barriers. This engagement summary includes the activities and results that informed the development of the program. A total of 17 participants from a variety of community organizations took part in the engagement activities, including various meetings and a survey. Engagement goals, intended audiences, activities, dates, participation rates and detailed engagement results are provided in the Final Engagement Report that follows this summary. Engagement results from all activities that informed the project are summarized below.

Greater Support Needed

All participants identified that greater supports for low-income residents are needed in Saskatoon and that the addition of a new waste utility could greatly impact low-income residents who are already having difficulty managing their monthly income. It was suggested that many low-income residents would be interested in a waste affordability program, especially those already in need of assistance and those experiencing [deep income poverty](#).

Opportunities and Barriers

Participants identified numerous opportunities and barriers to the Program, which included the following themes:

Intimidating bureaucracy: one of the largest barriers for low-income residents is being intimidated by bureaucracy that often leaves those who are eligible confused and fearful of providing personal information to program administrators

Ongoing monitoring: the program needs continual, long-term monitoring following its implementation to ensure it is achieving the City’s performance indicators and having a positive impact on those it is intended for

Simplified process: the application process needs to be simple and well-defined so that it can be easily referenced and understood; provide clear messaging on who is eligible for the program.

Considerations for Renters

Considering the number of rental units that would qualify, that utility costs are more commonly paid separately by renters, and that utilities can be a major concern for low-income renters, participants agreed that low-income renters could greatly benefit from a waste affordability program. One of the major concerns identified by participants was that landlords should not benefit from the affordability program and that the application process should ensure the savings remain with low-income renters.

Applying

Popular recommendations provided by many participants to make the application process more accessible was for the City to provide locations throughout Saskatoon where residents could apply for affordability programs or drop off the application form in-person. Some participants suggested City Hall could be a good location for a designated service centre, due to being located downtown and near the downtown bus terminal; however, other participants suggested public libraries, Service Canada centres, and partnering settlement agencies could also be accessible sites.

Providing multiple ways to apply for the program, via paper and on-line, is important in making the process more accessible to residents. Participants also suggested that providing a common portal for residents to apply for all City affordability programs would be of great benefit.

Eligibility

Participants identified that the typical standards for income verification are not accessible for a wide variety of residents. This is especially true for newcomer, refugees, and international residents who do not possess a notice of assessment within the first year of being a Canadian citizen. The current practise implemented by the City's Social Development staff in accepting proof of eligibility from local settlement agencies was strongly supported by participants.

Longevity of the Program

Most participants supported the City implementing a short-term affordability program to aid in the transition towards the waste utility. Participants suggested that after this period a review of the program could determine if the funding would be better allocated to other low-income assistance programs. Overall, participants stressed that since waste collection is a fundamental right of every human being, participants called on the City to continue to engage and work with low-income residents to better support them throughout the lifetime of the program.

Education and Awareness

Participants advised that the City develop messaging and specific marketing materials that target the specific demographic groups the City is trying to reach. For an example, incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, inter-generational responsibility, and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action into waste messaging for Indigenous people could help to build relationships and make residents more comfortable in trusting the City. Using plain language with images was suggested by many participants, since it can make programs more accessible and the application process easier to understand. Participants also strongly agreed that information for newcomers, refugees and international residents should be offered in their own languages whenever possible.

When asked what kind of assistance community organizations could provide, many participants suggested forming partnerships to help raise awareness in their communities. Community organizations can more effectively communicate to residents they support by putting the information in the context of why it should matter to them, how they will benefit from the program, and how it will improve Saskatoon.

Other suggestions to improve education and awareness for the Program included providing information through utility bills, showcasing that only those who use the service are paying for it, and developing information and programs on how residents can reduce their waste.

Links to Other City Affordability Programs

It was suggested that there currently is a disconnect between City affordability programs, likely due to their lack of cross-promotion even though they are trying to reach the same audience. Many participants suggested that the City should create a common application process that allows those who are eligible to become aware of and apply to numerous affordability programs at the same time.

Final Comments

When asked to provide their final comments about the Program, participants provided the following:

Communication and education: the community needs to be aware of why the City is transitioning towards a waste utility, how they can reduce their household waste, and how they can access the Program

Holistic approach: the City needs to provide a common process for low-income residents to apply for their numerous affordability programs; this includes providing accessible spaces where residents can apply and ask City staff questions about affordability programs

Support: many participants expressed their support for the City in developing the Waste Utility Affordability Program; participants called on the City to continue to provide more opportunities for low-income residents

Consideration of Results

Results from the engagement activities were considered, alongside internal considerations and best practice research, in the development of affordability program options. Feedback received during engagement was also used by the project team to evaluate different program options and in the report to Council to describe the advantages or disadvantages of each option.

Communication and Education

Participants identified numerous cross-promotional opportunities and what information is needed to encourage participation within the community, such as providing educational information through community organizations, developing demographic-specific content, and clearly outlining how to enroll in the program. This information will be used in future education and communication campaigns.

Discounting Waste Services

There was general feedback that reducing the cost of service would benefit low-income households. Participants supported the idea that discounting the cost waste diversion services (organics and recycling) was preferable to discounting the cost of garbage. Therefore, a temporary

affordability program for a utility was identified as being beneficial to help with the transition (see “Short-term Program”)

Equity and Inclusion

We heard that equity and inclusion, should be considered throughout the implementation and lifetime of the program. The following options were proposed:

- Continue to engage with community organizations and low-income residents to ensure the program is easy to access and participate in
- Implement a communications campaign tailored to specific demographics to highlight the program and the benefits it provides
- Review the program to ensure it is meeting the needs of the community
- Use tools such as [Equity Toolkit for Projects](#) to guide this work.

Implementation

Some of the feedback collected throughout the engagement process pertained more specifically to the implementation of the program, such as how the enrolment process can be streamlined, creating accessible locations throughout the city for individuals to learn more about the program, and the need for continued engagement. Consistency across all City of Saskatoon affordability programs is important to stakeholders. These suggestions will be explored further as the program continues to develop.

Short-Term Program

We heard from participants that a short-term program was preferred to help with the transition towards a waste utility and allow for future changes to the program if needed.

Support from Community Organizations

Many community organizations expressed their ability to help promote the program to those they support if they are provided with the materials to do so. The City will continue to work with these community organizations during future education and communication campaigns to ensure they are being provided with the information they need.

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1 Background

Many cities across Canada have found that charging a fee for waste services based on volume works to reduce landfill waste, address the impacts of climate change, and encourage better waste habits within the community. Other realized benefits to funding curbside garbage and organics services through a utility, include:

- Creating an opportunity for customers to control their costs
- Ensuring that only those receiving the collection services pay for it
- Increasing transparency for service costs and funding
- Providing an incentive to reduce and divert household waste

Therefore, in October 2021 City Council directed City of Saskatoon (City) Administration to implement a fixed monthly utility rate for curbside organics in 2023 and variable rates for the black cart garbage utility in 2024. The utility fees will apply to residents who have curbside garbage and future green cart organics collection services (approximately 73,000 households). More specifically, it will apply to all single-family homes and residential buildings with up to four units.

The ability for low-income and fixed-income residents to pay the new waste utility was identified as a concern in previous public engagement activities. The City heard that changing the funding from a property tax model to a utility model may have a greater financial impact on low-income households. As a result, in October 2021 when the change to a waste utility was approved, City Council resolved, *“that the Administration proceed with waste utility affordability program development focusing on a transitional approach, reporting back by Q3, 2022.”* Therefore, the City is exploring options to support low-income residents to address these concerns and ensure the benefits of a waste utility are realized through the Waste Utility Affordability Program (Program).

From June to August 2022, City Administration engaged with community organizations in the development of the Program. Based on what we heard, in addition to best practise research and internal considerations, City Administration has developed program options which will be presented to City Council in Fall 2022.

1.1 Strategic Goals

The City's [Official Community Plan \(OCP\)](#) states that, “A sustainable community is one that meets its needs today without limiting the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This means a community that sustains its quality of life and accommodates growth and change by balancing long term economic, environmental and social needs.” The OCP then goes on to state that the “Plan recognizes the following principles in building a community with a sustainable quality of life: a) economic diversity, economic security, and fiscal responsibility; b) environmental protection and stewardship; c) equity in land use decisions and a fair distribution of community services”. Additionally, section D2.1 of the OCP outlines policies intended to “facilitate social inclusion and equity in Saskatoon’s programs, services, and activities.”

The Program supports the City's [Strategic Plan 2022-2025](#) by promoting the following priorities and outcomes:

- **Environmental Sustainability:** by enhancing solid waste diversion and reducing our emissions

- **Equitable and Accessible Services:** by working with underserved populations to co-create and implement solutions that result in improved safety, quality of life and continually improving service offerings in the community
- **Customer-Centric Service Delivery:** by using public feedback on civic programs and services to improve customer experience and providing an equitable and quality customer experience for all residents

1.2 City Project Team

- Mike Jordan, Chief Public Policy and Government Relations Officer
- Brendan Lemke, Director, Water & Waste Operations
- Katie Burns, Manager, Community Leadership and Program Development, Sustainability
- Chelsey Bartlett, Senior Project Management Engineer, Water & Waste Operations
- Ben Brodie, Project Manager, Sustainability
- Diran Adenugba, Communications Consultant, Communications & Public Engagement
- Kenton Lysak, Engagement Consultant, Communications & Public Engagement
- Roy Lavallee, Social Development Consultant, Recreation and Community Development
- Gabriella James, Accounting Coordinator 1, Finance
- Theresa Chapman, Revenue Collections Manager, Corporate Revenue
- Brock Storey, Operations Manager, Water & Waste Operations
- Peter Andrews, Project Manager, Information Technology
- Carlos Bustos, Utilities Revenue Manager, Corporate Revenue

1.3 Spokesperson(s)

- Brendan Lemke, Director, Water & Waste Operations
- Mike Jordan, Chief Public Policy and Government Relations Officer

1.4 Summary of Engagement Strategy

Participants were provided the opportunity to inform the following engagement goal:

Options Identification

- Identify options that may work in Saskatoon
- Identify program elements that enhance opportunities and mitigate barriers

A summary of participants, level of influence, engagement objectives, engagement goals and engagement activities completed are provided below.

Table 1: Summary of Engagement Strategy

Phase	Participants	Level of Influence	Engagement Objective	Engagement Goal	Engagement Activities
1	Impacted Groups Subject Matter Experts	Involve	Identify options, opportunities and barriers	Options Identification	Correspondence Meetings

* Correspondence refers to emails, phone calls, and virtual meetings with participants

A summary of engagement activities selected, activity and event dates, intended audiences, and number of participants engaged for each engagement goal is provided in the table below.

Table 2: Summary of Engagement Activities

Phase	Participants	Activity	Timeframe	Participants
1	Impacted Groups Subject Matter Experts	Meetings	June to August 2022	15
	Impacted Groups Subject Matter Experts	Survey	June to August 2022	2
	Subtotal			
Total Participation June to August 2022				17

Engagement activities, participants, marketing techniques, analysis methods and results are described in this report, followed by a summary of evaluation feedback and data limitations.

1.5 Participants

The participants outlined below were identified due to their knowledge, interest in, or their potential to be impacted by the Program. These groups include:

1.5.1 City Administration

Various City departments and staff with associated knowledge or correlated projects involving low-income assistance programs, including:

- Leisure Access
- Low-income Bus Pass
- Subsidized Spay & Neuter Program
- Seniors Property Tax Deferral Program
- Service Saskatoon
- Recreation and Community Development
- Corporate Revenue
- Sustainability
- Water and Waste Operations

1.5.2 Impacted Groups

Organizations who represent communities that may be disproportionately impacted by the implementation of the Program, including:

- Global Gathering Place
- Immigration Partnership Saskatoon
- Indigenous organizations
 - Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.
 - Saskatoon Tribal Council
- Renters of Saskatoon and Area
- SaskAbilities
- Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre
- Saskatoon Newcomer Network and Information Centre
- Saskatchewan Landlord's Association
- Saskatoon Open Door Society
- Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership

Engagement with all participants aimed to be inclusive in terms of neighbourhood, age, gender, marital status, family size, culture, citizenship, income, etc.

2 Engagement Activities

Participants provided their feedback through individual meetings, a survey, or by contacting City staff directly. All engagement activities are described in further detail below.

2.1 Meetings and Survey

From June to August 2022, various meetings were held with individual community organizations. The meetings included a short presentation that introduced the Waste Utility Affordability Program followed by a series of discussions. Following the meeting participants were invited to provide further feedback through a short survey that consisted of the same discussion questions asked during the meeting.

2.1.1 Intended Audience

Participants included specific Impacted Groups, including:

- Global Gathering Place
- Renters of Saskatoon and Area
- SaskAbilities
- Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre
- Saskatchewan Landlord's Association
- Saskatoon Open Door Society

2.1.2 Marketing Techniques

No marketing techniques were employed for these activities. Participants were contacted individually by the project lead and engagement consultant to organize meetings.

2.1.3 Analysis

Meeting notes and survey results were analyzed using mixed methods. Qualitative methods included a thematic analysis and open coding of responses to identify key concepts.

2.1.4 What We Heard

Greater Support Needed

All participants identified the need for greater supports for low-income residents in Saskatoon. Household expenses for low-income residents are increasing due to inflation, rising commodity prices, higher fuel prices, and increasing utility rates; therefore, many low-income residents already cannot keep up to their household costs without additional supports being available. These considerations are compounded by the many continuing socioeconomic challenges (i.e., rising costs of living, finding a job, etc.) within Saskatoon as well as the COVID-19 pandemic that has further isolated low-income residents. Therefore, participants believed that the addition of a new waste utility could greatly impact low-income residents who are already having difficulty managing their monthly income. Participants supported the City in providing assistance to low-income residents, such as offering organics and recycling services at no cost, to help them transition to the waste utility.

Who Should the Program Support

Participants all agreed that low-income residents need to be supported in the transition to a waste utility and that many low-income residents would be interested in a waste affordability program,

especially those already in need of assistance and those experiencing deep poverty. When asked which specific demographic groups are in greater need for this form of support, participants identified individuals with disabilities, Indigenous people, refugees, and seniors as needing greater assistance. Some participants called on the City to change their measures of poverty since many groups are often ignored, such as seniors that have lost social assistance support, individuals with disabilities not being recognized for carrying extra costs, renters, and single-parent families.

Considerations for Renters

Participants identified that many low-income families currently rent attics, basements, or main floors in single-family homes or residential buildings; however, it was noted that many single-family homes can be too costly for low-income renters. The Saskatchewan Landlords Association estimated that 40% of their approximately 700 members across the province currently own single-family housing that would qualify for the waste utility services (i.e., residential properties with up to four units); therefore, considerations should be made for low-income renters in Saskatoon.

Participants stated that it is more common for renters to pay for their utilities separately from other tenants or their landlords, especially in single-family homes and duplexes where each unit has separate meters. In these situations, the landlord and tenant need to sign an agreement with the City to allow for the tenant to apply for separate utilities, which terminates when the tenant closes the utility accounts. Since landlords may include utilities within the rent or not, tenants would have to either pay for all their utilities, (i.e., energy, water, communications, etc.) or the landlord requests payment of roughly 30% of the monthly utility costs for the building.

One of the major concerns identified by participants was that landlords should not benefit from the affordability program and that the application process should ensure the savings remain with low-income renters. Participants stressed that the City should take steps to ensure that landlords are not able to apply for the Program and receive the savings without passing them onto their tenants. However, it was also suggested that the City should not exclude landlords from assisting low-income residents in applying for the Program. Landlords already working with low-income renters could provide information on the Program via their tenant welcome packages. Landlords could also assist those who are eligible in applying for the program, since 90% of landlords are already provided with income verification documents.

Considering the number of rental units that would qualify, that utility costs are more commonly paid separately by renters, and that utilities can be a major concern for low-income renters, participants agreed that low-income renters could greatly benefit from a waste affordability program.

Opportunities and Barriers

Participants identified numerous opportunities and barriers to the Program, which included the following themes:

Appearing as revenue generating: some participants inquired whether this was a revenue generating opportunity for the City and suggested that many residents may share this view.

Blame: one participant expressed their concern for low-income residents being blamed by other taxpayers for the costs associated with this Program; future communications should emphasize why assistance is needed for low-income residents.

Education and awareness: communications should focus on how individuals will benefit from the program and where they can learn more about it.

Enforcement: enforcing the proper use of the various carts will be difficult, especially if there are financial penalties for not using the carts properly.

Intimidating bureaucracy: one of the largest barriers for low-income residents is being intimidated by the bureaucracy that often leaves those who are eligible confused and fearful of providing personal information to program administrators.

Large families: it was identified that although low-income residents with larger families would need larger carts, they most likely would choose a smaller cart to save on costs; this may cause excess waste to be dumped alongside the garbage cart.

Ongoing monitoring: the program needs continual, long-term monitoring following its implementation to ensure it is achieving the City's performance indicators and having a positive impact on those it is intended for.

Partner with community organizations: many participants identified that they already support their clients by making them aware of the various City affordability programs and help them apply; community organizations are willing and able to assist in raising awareness about City initiatives but need to be informed on what information they should be providing.

Pass on benefits: any financial savings or income generated from City garbage, recycling, and organics services should be returned to the community to encourage continued participation.

Simplified process: the application process needs to be simple and well-defined so that it can be easily referenced and understood; provide clear messaging on who is eligible for the program.

Technology: can be a barrier to many low-income residents with limited access to the internet.

Transportation: one participant suggested providing better support for the working poor, those who do not own a vehicle, or are homeless through a ride share program that provides access to the landfill, compost, or recycling centres.

Applying

A popular recommendation provided by many participants to make the application process more accessible was for the City to provide locations throughout Saskatoon where residents could apply for affordability programs or drop off the application form in-person. Some participants suggested City Hall could be a good location for a designated service centre, due to being located downtown and near the downtown bus terminal; however, other participants suggested public libraries, Service Canada centres, and partnering settlement agencies could also be accessible sites.

Providing multiple ways to apply for the program, via paper and online, is important in making the process more accessible to residents. Participants noted that newcomers and international residents often prefer printed copies so they acquire assistance in completing the application from family members and community organizations. Participants also suggested that providing a common portal for residents to apply for all City affordability programs would be of great benefit.

Eligibility

Participants identified that the typical standards for income verification are not accessible for a wide variety of residents. This is especially true for newcomers, refugees, and international residents who do not possess a notice of assessment within the first year of being a Canadian citizen. The current practise implemented by the City's Recreation and Cultural Development staff in accepting referrals from local settlement agencies as proof of income/program eligibility was strongly supported by participants. By allowing community organizations to verify an applicant's Newcomer status (arrival within the past 12 months) and notify the City that they are requesting this service on an individual or family's behalf, participants have seen a greater interest in those who they support. Participants identified that if proof of eligibility is required prior to their first notice of assessment, those who qualify should be able to provide redacted copies of immigration papers, letters of employment or documentation from the federal Resettlement Assistance Program (with sensitive information removed) as proof of income/program eligibility.

One participant suggested waiving the need for income verification in general to improve the accessibility of the application process; however, another participant noted that not all people who immigrate to Canada have the same economic status and would require this form of assistance. For an example, participants suggested that refugees should be automatically waived from providing income verification since they are seeking refuge.

Some participants questioned whether students would be eligible for the Program, considering they could be eligible for other low-income affordability programs and could benefit from the Program.

Longevity of the Program

Most participants supported the City implementing a short-term affordability program to aid in the transition towards the waste utility. Participants suggested that after this period, a review of the program could determine if the funding would be better allocated to other low-income assistance programs. One participant identified that although a support program would be beneficial at the start of the transition towards a waste utility, it could gradually phase out over time once residents are able to account for the additional costs. Overall, participants stressed that since waste collection is a fundamental right of every human being, participants called on the City to continue to engage and work with low-income residents to better support them throughout the lifetime of the program.

Naming the Program

Participants recommended that to limit confusion, the term "affordability" should be used to ensure those who are eligible understand this program is for them and so it connects with other affordability programs that already use this term. One participant suggested calling the program the "Low-income Utility Affordability Program", however others were cautious about using the term "low-income" within the program name since there are eligible residents who do not identify as low-income residents.

Education and Awareness

Participants advised that the City develop messaging and specific marketing materials that target the specific demographic the City is trying to reach. When asked which groups could benefit from specific messaging, participants identified individuals with disabilities, seniors, and Indigenous residents as benefiting from specific messaging. For an example, incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, intergenerational responsibility, and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action into waste

messaging for Indigenous people could help to build relationships and make residents more comfortable in trusting the City.

Using plain language with images was suggested by many participants, since it can make programs more accessible and the application process easier to understand. Participants also strongly agreed that information for newcomers, refugees and international residents should be offered in their own language whenever possible. An example that was provided was the SGI Driver's Handbook, which allows readers the ability to toggle through information being provided in multiple languages on their website.

When asked what kind of assistance community organizations could provide, many participants suggested forming partnerships to help raise awareness in their communities. Community organizations can more effectively communicate to residents they support by putting the information in the context of why it should matter to them, how they will benefit from the program, and how it will improve Saskatoon. This would require that the City provides frontline staff in these organizations with clear and concise information so they can understand the program completely before educating others. It was suggested that many community organizations host workshops or information sessions where residents can learn about what opportunities are available to them, such as affordability programs. Participants suggested that these community events could be an opportunity for individuals to learn about the Program and apply onsite at a mobile sign-up station if they are interested.

Other suggestions to improve education and awareness for the Program included:

- Add photos and visuals to all marketing and information materials
- Create a one-page document that could be distributed by housing providers to renters
- Define who the waste utility applies to, such as the difference between single-family and multi-family unit households, because these terms are not commonly understood
- Develop programs and videos that provide information on how residents can reduce their household waste and what goes in each cart
- Include Indigenous ways of knowing and language within information and materials, such as respecting the earth is the highest honour and it is important for their children and grandchildren to enjoy their lives
- Include the diversity of people in Saskatoon within marketing and awareness campaigns to show that all residents can take steps to reduce their waste
- Messaging should highlight that it is not about making money
- Offer 1:1 programming with residents to provide them with information
- Offer programs at newcomer and international events throughout Saskatoon
- Partner with other social assistance programs offered by the government, such as community clinics and the Ministry of Social Services
- Partner with the school systems to teach about waste in schools so that intergenerational impacts can be achieved
- Provide information in multiple languages
- Provide information through utility bills
- Provide pamphlets at civic centres, bus stations, and city events that are accessible to low-income residents, such as leisure centres, sidewalk sales, and large City events

- Showcase that only those who use the service pay for it
- Use a multi-marketing approach that incorporates social media, radio programs, and local media outlets to pass on information

Links to Other City Affordability Programs

Although the City currently provides numerous affordability programs for low-income residents and many use them, participants also suggested that some residents do not find them accessible, are unaware of them, or cannot afford them. It was suggested that there currently is a disconnect between these programs due to their lack of cross-promotion even though they are trying to reach the same audience. Many participants suggested that the City should create a common application process that allows those who are eligible to become aware of and apply to numerous affordability programs at the same time.

Support and Final Comments

All participants expressed their support for the City in developing a waste utility affordability program for low-income residents. When asked to provide their final comments about the Program, participants provided the following:

Communication and education: the second most popular theme; the community needs to be aware of why the City is transitioning towards a waste utility, how they can reduce their household waste, and how they can access the Program; the Program should provide easy ways for residents to contact City staff to have their questions answered.

Equity: the City needs to continue to include equity considerations in the design of the Program and future City initiatives; enforcement measures need to incorporate equity considerations for low-income residents, since they should not be financially penalized if they are unable to afford the service.

Funding: more funding is required for low-income affordability programs, such as this one, to provide more opportunities for low-income residents.

Holistic approach: the most popular theme; the City needs to provide a common process for low-income residents to apply for their numerous affordability programs; this includes providing accessible spaces where residents can apply and ask City staff questions about affordability programs.

Simple: participants stressed that the Programs needs to be simple to understand and apply for.

Support: the third most popular theme; many participants expressed their support for the City in developing the Program; participants called on the City to continue to provide more opportunities for low-income residents.

3 Evaluation of Engagement

Evaluation is discussed in terms of feedback received during engagement activities and through informal comments, data limitations and opportunities for improvement.

3.1 Meeting Evaluation

Informal feedback was received through meetings where participants indicated that they appreciated being engaged and supported the City in continuing to engage the community on concerns and programs for low-income residents. Many participants supported the City's effort in developing the Program, stressing the importance of affordability programs in supporting low-income residents in Saskatoon.

3.2 Data Limitations

Due to the public health orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the engagement activities for this project were conducted virtually. Virtual engagement has limitations, primarily by limiting accessibility for those without internet access or with limited computer literacy and by enabling greater accessibility to those who are more active online. Multiple avenues were available for community organizations to provide their input and mitigate the inability to conduct in-person activities; however, engagement practises and procedures were limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in conducting physical meetings with the community.

The timing of engagement during the summer months and during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in numerous participants and low-income residents being unable to participate in our engagement process. Although engagement activities for low-income residents to provide their feedback were planned with the help of numerous community organizations, the timing of our engagement combined with more community members having more pressing priorities resulted in these events having to be canceled. Therefore, some participants may not have been able to fully participate in the engagement activities conducted; however, the results are considered to provide the best available indication of how participants view the Program at the time.

It is strongly recommended that ongoing engagement with low-income residents occurs during the implementation of the Program to ensure the goals of the Program are being met and residents are more fully able to provide their feedback.

3.3 Opportunities for Improvement

Based on participant feedback, the following opportunities for improvement will be considered for future engagement activities:

- Any written or verbal information uses plain language and easy-to-understand terms
- Better engage with low-income renters, newcomers, and disabilities communities through more face-to-face opportunities or via phone
- Educating the community on the importance of waste diversion and on the Program are priorities for future awareness campaigns
- Steps should be taken to explore better opportunities, which are an important tool for engaging communities

4 Next Steps

The next steps for development of the Waste Utility Affordability Program are described below:

Options Identification

- Identify options that may work in Saskatoon
- Identify program elements that enhance opportunities and mitigate barriers

Report to City Council

- Program options and a recommended program will be presented to City Council in Fall 2022