



# Water Conservation Strategy

*What We Heard – Feedback on Options*  
August 25, 2021



## Engagement Summary

The City of Saskatoon is developing a long-term Water Conservation Strategy that will focus on all water uses and users including residential; the industrial, commercial, and institutional sectors; the City itself; and water used indoors and outdoors. The Water Conservation Strategy aims to develop best practices, generate, and gain approval for programs that could lead to incentive programs for residents and businesses, develop educational materials, and create the potential for changes to policies/regulations. From February 2020 – June 2021, Administration engaged stakeholders on relevant components of a Water Conservation Strategy. Based on what we heard from stakeholders, in addition to further research and internal considerations, Administration will develop a comprehensive strategy that will be presented to City Council.

The third phase of the engagement strategy was designed to inform the following engagement goals for the development of the Water Conservation Strategy:

- Share relevant components of the Water Conservation Strategy with stakeholders to close the loop and provide opportunities to identify any red flags
- Validate key findings and test with a wider stakeholder base

A total of 367 respondents participated in engagement activities within this current phase of engagement. Relevant components that emerged from the engagement activities are discussed in this section.

### **Better Understanding Your Water Use**

Respondents from previous engagement activities identified that one of the main challenges to reducing water within their home or businesses is that they do not know if they are currently using too much water or not. Another concern identified was that water bills are difficult to understand and currently do not provide enough information to track water use.

To address these concerns, the following program elements were proposed:

- Education campaign on how to read your water bill and how water is currently billed (inclined block) to Saskatoon residents and business owners
- Explore options to make water bills easier to understand
- Using a new water metering system called [Advanced Metering Infrastructure](#) (AMI) to better understand our water use with more accuracy and reliability. This would include education programs to ensure residents and businesses are aware of the benefits of AMI

When asked whether they agreed with the proposed approaches, 45% stated yes, followed by 34% stating they somewhat agreed and 13% stating they did not agree. Comments and suggestions for improvement provided by the respondents included the following:

**Messaging:** messaging should focus on both the benefits and cost savings associated with water efficiencies; baselines for ideal water use should be used as a basis for comparison

**Monitoring:** understanding how to read a water bill will not necessarily equate to less usage unless it actually is easier to monitor your own use; to facilitate changes in behaviours this information must be easily accessible and actively show the progress/changes being made

**Transparency:** the City must clearly describe all associated fees on water bills, such as stormwater management, flood management, and other temporary charges; there is frustration over the lack of transparency for the current charges on water bills

Participants suggested the following when asked how they would help residents take part in the water conservation programs:

- Create a sense of ownership and responsibility through community stewardship opportunities
- Highlight the benefits to residents instead of the negatives
- Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into awareness materials
- Offer information and forums in the diversity of languages that are represented in Saskatoon to promote two-way communication
- Provide accurate water consumption data to residents and show them how to reduce their consumption

When asked what are the best ways to share information with residents regarding water conservation, participants suggested working with community/opinion leaders in diverse newcomer groups, creating innovative social media handles for the community to follow, and involving the community associations.

### **Affordability**

In previous engagement activities, respondents expressed concern over water rates increasing if Saskatoon's overall water use is reduced. Respondents also expressed their concern for the impacts this could have on low-income residents and renters who could pay higher water fees relative to their household income. The following options were proposed to alleviate some of these concerns:

- Explore incentives for owners of affordable and rental housing to improve their water efficiency
- Programs to educate renters and property managers about the ways they can save water (e.g., finding and fixing leaks) and reduce their costs
- Committing to future public engagement as programs are developed

When asked whether they agreed with the proposed options, 46% of respondents said they agreed, followed by 32% who said they somewhat agreed and 15% that said they did not agree. From the comments provided by respondents, the following themes emerged:

**Individual monitoring and sub-meters:** water use needs to be monitored for each individual rental unit rather than the building or else changes cannot be tracked and benefits cannot be realised; this also improves individual accountability since renters will pay for their water separately from the building

**Landlords and property managers:** many respondents felt that asking landlords/property managers about water conservation can be difficult and can further strain relationships; allowing landlords to have more authority over water regulation could put renters in more difficult situations, such as more frequent inspections

*Savings:* unless incentives are significant then there is little reason for renters and property owners to perform any efficiency upgrades

Participants identified that many tenants want to improve their water efficiency, but currently do not have the means to or are unaware of any opportunities. However, many tenants do not see any direct incentives to conserving water; therefore, differences in opinions exist between tenants within a building which could delay efficiencies being made for the entire building.

Participants also expressed their hesitation over water rates increasing if the programs represented within the Strategy are effective. It was suggested that this may be a vehicle for landlords/property managers to raise the rent in a more hidden way or to provide more opportunities for landlords to enter the rental unit to make upgrades when not welcomed by tenants.

Suggestions for increasing participation in the recommended programs included using plain language information in the monthly water bills, providing information specific to new homeowners and renters, and having support staff to assist with the program and support participants directly.

### **General Considerations**

Considerations from previous engagement activities were provided for the public to provide further feedback on including educational programming, the City leading by example, exploring grey water system opportunities, and the recommended programs and phasing. Comments were provided by respondents and summarized within the following themes:

*Costs:* many respondents identified that costs for water and living in Saskatoon are already high and that any added costs should be minimal or entirely removed; unexplained taxes and fees are a major concern for numerous respondents who called for greater transparency

*Grey water:* the most commented on theme; there is a lot of interest from respondents in grey water systems being allowed within the City

*Support:* many respondents expressed their support for the recommended programs and considerations; out of the initiatives listed respondents provided the greatest support for the City leading by example and the current phasing of the recommended programs

Suggestions for other programs that could be considered included exploring watering restrictions for lawn maintenance during the summer (ex. alternating days), reusing water from City rooftops and hydrants, and promoting rainwater collectors.

### **Final Thoughts**

When asked whether they were more willing to participate in any of the recommended programs considering the changes to the Strategy, most respondents stated yes (45%), followed by being somewhat more likely (31%) and not (13%). The largest barriers for those somewhat or not wanting to participate in the recommended programs include the costs associated with the program and increasing water rates, water conservation not being a priority, and the addition of unneeded bureaucracy from the City.

Final comments and suggestions provided by respondents included the following themes:

*Education:* this was a heavily debated topic throughout the survey with some respondents believing education to be ineffective and a waste of resources while others believe it to be essential for the future success of the Strategy

*Equal treatment:* some participants suggested that all residents, businesses, and industries should participate in the program equally for everyone to feel like they are doing their part to conserve water

*Support:* many respondents provided their support for the Strategy and recommended programs

*Water information:* participants asked whether more accurate information on local water quality and quantity could be shared for the community to be more informed

*Water rate increases and service charges:* many respondents identified their concern for water rates increasing if conservation initiatives are successful; there is also frustration over current service charges and the lack of information as to what people are being charged for

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## 1 Background

The City of Saskatoon (City) is developing a long-term Water Conservation Strategy that will focus on all water uses and users including residential; the industrial, commercial, and institutional sector; the City itself; and water used indoors and outdoors. There are many reasons to conserve water including:

1. To help households and businesses moderate their water bills and relieve utility burden to those most impacted by cost increases. Place equity and opportunity at the forefront of water conservation, making the program accessible.
2. Reduce the City's corporate greenhouse gas emissions by 80% (below 2014 levels) by 2050. Emissions related to treating and pumping water make up about a third of overall City emissions and can be reduced with a combination of conservation, system efficiency, and use of renewable energy.
3. Increase our water systems' resilience. Prepare for a changing climate by reducing demand.
4. Possibly postponing major and costly upgrades to add capacity to Saskatoon's water and wastewater systems.

The Water Conservation Strategy aims to develop and gain approval for programs that could lead to incentive programs for residents and businesses, develop best practices and educational materials, and create the potential for changes to policies/regulations. Program outcomes include identifying the benefits and impacts of water conservation initiatives, developing a prioritized list of recommended water conservation initiatives, and determining how they should be implemented. For these and other reasons, City Administration engaged internal and external stakeholders as well as the community in the development of the long-term strategy.

The Water Conservation Strategy supports numerous sustainability initiatives within the City of Saskatoon and is explicitly included in the Low Emission Community Plan. It is intended that the strategy will incorporate an integrated water management approach and Triple Bottom Line framework, in order to produce a long-term planning document highlighting the benefits of conservation and efficiency, the potential impacts, a prioritized list of recommended water conservation and efficiency initiatives, a multi-year workplan, and cost estimates.

From February 2020 – June 2021, Administration engaged stakeholders on relevant components of a Water Conservation Strategy. Based on what we heard from stakeholders, in addition to further research and internal considerations, Administration will develop a comprehensive strategy that will be presented to City Council.

### 1.1 Strategic Goals

This project supports the Strategic Goals of Environmental Leadership and Sustainable Growth, contributing to reducing our consumption of water and energy.

### 1.2 City Project Team

- Jeanna South, Director, Sustainability
- Russ Munro, Director, Saskatoon Water
- Amber Weckworth, Manager, Climate, Strategy, and Data, Sustainability
- Genevieve Russell, Special Project Manager, Sustainability

- Gabriella James, Accounting Coordinator, Finance
- Megan Quintal, Marketing Consultant, Communications & Public Engagement
- Kenton Lysak, Engagement Consultant, Communications & Public Engagement

### 1.3 Spokesperson(s)

- Jeanna South, Director, Sustainability
- Amber Weckworth, Manager Climate, Strategy, and Data, Sustainability

## 2 Summary of Engagement Strategy

The following engagement goals were identified to help inform development of a Water Conservation Strategy:

- Identify benefits and barriers and explore opportunities to enhance initiatives
  - Identify benefits and barriers to water conservation initiatives in Saskatoon
  - Of the potential initiatives, identify opportunities to enhance benefits and mitigate barriers
- Select preferred initiatives to prioritize in the Strategy
  - Identify public preference for each initiative to help inform selection of preferred initiatives to prioritize and plan options identification
- Close the Loop
  - Share relevant components of the Water Conservation Strategy with stakeholders to close the loop and provide opportunities to identify any red flags
  - Validate key findings and test with wider stakeholder base

We Are Here

### 2.1 Stakeholder Groups

Four stakeholder groups were identified with the potential to be impacted by the Water Conservation Strategy. These groups include:

#### 2.1.1 Low Emissions Community Plan Stakeholders

- Organizations engaged during the development of the Low Emissions Community Plan were identified as stakeholders to continue engagement with on future Low Emissions Community Plan initiatives, including the Water Conservation Strategy. These Low Emissions Community Plan Stakeholder groups include:
  - Business Improvement Districts
  - Greater Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce
  - North Saskatoon Business Association (NSBA)
  - Saskatoon & Region Homebuilders Association (SRHBA)
  - Federated Cooperatives Limited
  - Nutrien
  - University of Saskatchewan
- If the identified stakeholders showed interest in participating in the engagement program, they were assigned to the most relevant stakeholder group described below.

#### 2.1.2 Subject Matter Experts

- Internal and external stakeholders with experience or knowledge related to water conservation, retrofits, water costing and both indoor and outdoor water usage. These included industry experts such as:
  - Industry professionals: the Saskatoon and Region Home Builders Association, general contractors, plumbers, plumbing equipment suppliers, irrigation installers, building operators, and the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 179
  - Community organizations: Saskatchewan Environmental Society, Meewasin, Partners For the Saskatchewan River Basin, Safe Drinking Water Foundation, Saskatchewan Environmental and Industry Managers Association, Saskatoon Energy Management Taskforce

- Academic institutions: Global Institute for Water Security, Global Water Futures
- Water managers from other jurisdictions or the industrial, commercial, and institutional sectors
- Individuals recognized for innovation in water conservation technologies or programming.

### 2.1.3 Key Stakeholders

- Individuals and groups who will potentially be impacted by the implementation of Water Conservation programming in Saskatoon. The following groups/organizations were identified:
  - Equity groups
  - Indigenous residents and organizations
  - Low-income residents and organizations
  - Renters of Saskatoon and Area
  - SaskWater
  - Saskatoon Water

### 2.1.4 Water Consumers and Potential Program Users

- Stakeholder groups who currently use water and have the potential to participate in Water Conservation programming once implemented. Target audiences for engagement under this category include:
  - CHEP Good Food and Community Garden Leaders
  - Developers
  - Golf Courses (Internal)
  - Industrial, commercial, and institutional sector (i.e., businesses and organizations)
  - Meewasin
  - Parks department (Internal)
  - Property managers
  - Recreation and Community Development (Internal)
  - Renters of Saskatoon and Area
  - Residents (i.e., renters, homeowners and youth)
  - Saskatchewan Landlords' Association
  - Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Center

A summary of stakeholder groups, level of engagement, engagement objectives, engagement goals and engagement activities completed are provided below.

Table 1: Summary of Engagement Strategy

Phase	Stakeholder	Level of Participation	Objective	Engagement Goal	Potential Activities
0	Low Emissions Community Plan Stakeholders	Involve	I need to understand how citizens will be affected by a decision.	Determine level of interest of Low Emissions Community Plan Stakeholders and how they would like to be engaged.	Meetings/Phone Calls/Emails
1	Subject Matter Experts, SaskWater	Consult	I need to understand how citizens will be affected by a decision.	Identify benefits and barriers and explore opportunities to enhance initiatives.	Meetings/Phone Calls/Emails
1	Key Stakeholders Water Consumers	Involve	I need to understand how citizens will be affected by a decision.	Identify benefits and barriers and explore opportunities to enhance initiatives.	Meetings, Workshops Survey (Optional)
2	Key Stakeholders Water Consumers, Subject Matter Experts	Consult	I need comments to inform a decision.	Select preferred initiatives to prioritize in the Strategy	Survey, Meetings, Workshops
3	All Stakeholders	Consult	I need comments to inform a decision.	Feedback on draft strategy.	Feedback Form, Emails, Meetings

### 3 Engagement Activities

A Public Survey was used to collect feedback to inform the development of the Water Conservation Strategy.

#### 3.1 Public Survey

The Administration conducted an online public survey from March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The survey comprised a total of 7 closed- and open-ended questions to validate key findings and identify any concerns with the recommended programs. Respondents were able to write-in an “other” preference for numerous questions and provide explanations for their preferences.

##### 3.1.1 Intended Audience

The Public Survey was created for Subject Matter Experts, Key Stakeholder Groups, and Water Consumers and Potential Program Users.

##### 3.1.2 Marketing Techniques

A variety of marketing techniques were employed to reach the intended audience.

1. City Website
  - a. Updates to the Engage Page were made to encourage participation in the online survey
2. Social Media
  - a. The social media campaign, which ran from March 19<sup>th</sup> – April 1<sup>st</sup>, included Facebook and Twitter ads promoting the survey. An Instagram story with a clickable link was also used to promote the survey. All paid social media ads used location targeting
3. Digital
  - a. Online banner and display ads were also used, targeted to Saskatoon
4. Email
  - a. Personalized e-invites were sent to organizations and community members

##### 3.1.3 Analysis

The feedback provided was analyzed for the following indicators:

- Support for program components and options (count)
- Thematic analysis of reasoning offered for supporting certain program components
- Identify suggestions that might improve accessibility and uptake.

Mixed methods were used to analyze the data. Qualitative methods included the thematic analysis and open coding of responses.

##### 3.1.4 What We Heard

###### *Demographics*

A total of 356 respondents participated in the Public Survey. The largest group of respondents were residential homeowners (93%), followed by participants that rent properties (6%). Other groupings included:

Table 2: Public Survey Representation

Sectors Represented	Participants (%)
Residential homeowners	93
I rent the property I currently reside or have a business in	6
I own or run a business that owns the building it operates in	3
Property manager for a multi-unit residential property	3
I own a rental property	2
Property manager for an industrial, commercial, or institutional business property	2
Other	1

All age classifications were represented with most responses being submitted by respondents who were 65+ (29%), followed by 55-64 (20%) and 35-44 (20%).

### Better Understanding Your Water Use

Respondents from previous engagement activities identified that one of the main challenges to reducing water within their home or businesses is that they do not know if they are currently using too much water or not. Understanding whether they are using too much water was viewed as an important first step towards determining if changes are needed and to what degree they should be implemented. Another concern identified was that water bills are difficult to understand and currently do not provide enough information to track water use.

To address these concerns, the following program elements were proposed:

- Education campaign on how to read your water bill and how water is currently billed (inclined block) to Saskatoon residents and business owners
- Explore options to make water bills easier to understand
- Using a new water metering system called [Advanced Metering Infrastructure](#) (AMI) to better understand our water use with more accuracy and reliability. This would include education programs to ensure residents and businesses are aware of the benefits of AMI

When asked whether they agreed with the proposed approaches, 45% stated yes, followed by 34% stating they somewhat agreed and 13% stating they did not agree. The success of education programs was highly debated on within the comments provided by respondents, with many respondents feeling education programs are not effective in generating lasting behavioural changes while other respondents felt they are essential for the future success of the program. Comments and suggestions for improvement provided by the respondents were summarized into the following themes:

**Accuracy:** the AMI system allows the City to get accurate readings without relying on submissions by residents or additional staff

**Average use:** residents need to determine the average low/high water consumption for households of different sizes; create a 12-month rolling average of consumption and define where users are in relation to it on their water bills; relate monthly use to average use in order for participants to more easily track their progress for both water and costs savings

*“I may understand my bill completely, but not realize that my use is still way above average or really out of an 'acceptable' range.”*

*“Couldn't you also just make the water bill easier to read. Relating monthly usage to average use and be able to easily compare from month to month to track progress and know how much water you save and how that translates into cost savings.”*

**Combined approach:** education programs will not generate changes in behaviours alone since they must be combined with incentive and monitoring programs in order to be effective; education programs must be continuous or else they will lose their effectiveness; pamphlets included within water bills are not enough

**Costs:** the costs associated with the recommended programs should be weighed against the other needs of the City; what impact will AMI meters have on taxpayers; will this result in the City charging more for water use while delivering less; it was suggested that taxes make up a significant portion of their water bill and homeowners are already taxed enough

*“Education comes at a cost. So do new meters. Honestly, we conserve water (rain barrel for spring/summer usage, high efficiency low flow) and we still are seeing \$120 monthly bills. Education (mail outs? Wasted paper and cost) and new meters (I thought we already had new meters in the last 7 years)... for what? To increase our bills more? No thanks.”*

*“Telling people how much it costs is not an incentive to use less. Daily life will continue.”*

**Friendly competition:** water bills and AMI-related education could compare household consumption to their neighbours or other neighbourhoods; create a rating system from 1-5 that identifies if you are a higher consumer (ex. thermometer-type graphic)

**Knowledge leads to changes in behaviour:** education is critical for the success of any of the recommended programs; if residents knew specifically where they were using too much water, they would be more open to making efficiencies

**Messaging:** messaging should focus on both the benefits and cost savings associated with water efficiencies; baselines for ideal water use should be used as a basis for comparison; the number of people living in a household and type of house needs to be incorporated into the messaging as well

*“The message that needs to be conveyed is that the current assumption by many, that City water is a limitless resource, is wrong. Cultivating a culture of reduced water consumption, and related water supply conservation should be the City's 'education' plan.”*

*“Include on water bills a small statement such as "you are using more water than the average 4-person household" or "you are using less water than average, good job" etc. Something easy to read and understand rather than just seeing the usage numbers and not being able to relate them to anything.”*

**Monitoring:** understanding how to read a water bill will not necessarily equate to less usage unless it actually is easier to monitor your own use; to facilitate changes in behaviours, this information must be easily accessible and actively show the progress/changes being made

*“A monitoring system which will let you know when you exceed or are over using and send you a text or email (like data limit messages for your cell phone) will flag behaviour and make you aware.”*

*“In the words of the late Rob Dumont, “What gets measured gets managed!” Raising awareness of water billing and opportunities for saving, and making reading of water bills easier to understand is a valuable first step.”*

**Renter considerations:** water costs are included as part of rent and there is no understanding of how much individual tenants use; must find a way to separate the use of individual tenants from the overall building use

**Tips for saving water:** suggestions on how to save water should be provided within water bills

**Transparency:** the City must clearly describe all associated fees on water bills, such as stormwater management, flood management, and other temporary charges; there is frustration over the lack of transparency for the current charges on water bills

*“The current water bill contains so many different charges, it is difficult to comprehend. And ‘temporary’ additions have gone on long after the need they were designed to meet have past. These additions have been rolled into the general Bill, which the general taxpayer is unaware of.”*

**Units:** switching units for reporting water use in 100 ft<sup>3</sup> to litres (L) or cubic meters (m<sup>3</sup>) would make bills easier to understand

### **Affordability**

In previous engagement activities, respondents expressed concern over water rates increasing if Saskatoon’s overall water use is reduced. Respondents also expressed their concern for the impacts this could have on low-income residents and renters who could pay higher water fees relative to their household income. Respondents suggested that considerations for renters were needed due to water use being the responsibility of the property managers and it being difficult to track individual use due to the costs being lumped together for the entire building.

The following options were proposed to alleviate some of these concerns:

- Explore incentives for owners of affordable and rental housing to improve their water efficiency
- Programs to educate renters and property managers about the ways they can save water (e.g., finding and fixing leaks) and reduce their costs
- Committing to future public engagement as programs are developed

When asked whether they agreed with the proposed options, 46% of respondents said they agreed, followed by 32% who said they somewhat agreed and 15% that said they did not agree. From the comments provided by respondents, the following themes emerged:

**Beyond affordable housing:** there should be more assistance for low-income families who live outside of affordable housing opportunities

**Costs:** some respondents identified their hesitation in financially assisting those that are unable to participate in the recommended programs; it was suggested that unless property management companies (not just managers) are motivated through financial incentives or avoiding penalties, then it will be difficult to generate change; overall these programs should not increase taxes nor negatively impact water rates

**Education of renters:** educating and communicating with renters directly is critical for the success of the programs; how will this information be shared to renters if the focus is on property managers

*“People only truly understand when they have awareness and power over their own individual use.”*

**Individual monitoring and sub-meters:** water use needs to be monitored for each individual rental unit rather than the building or else changes cannot be tracked and benefits cannot be realised; this also improves individual accountability since renters will pay for their water separately from the building; however, outfitting water meters to every rental unit in a building will be costly and require a lot of work

*“Why not change water policy to allow more metering options at multi-unit residential buildings? Right now the city will not offer sub metering of water, like they do with electrical, and forces the one meter per building issue. If costs could be billed direct to occupants, it will do substantially more to make people aware of water consumption than any public education endeavor could possibly generate. Educating people on conservation without giving them the tools (metering) to measure their own consumption is like trying to teach someone to play guitar but not giving them strings on the instrument.”*

*“Unless apartments and condos have Individual water meters there will always be issues on who is consuming more water and who is subsidizing the cost of people who use too much water.”*

**Landlords and property managers:** many respondents felt that asking landlords/property managers about water conservation can be difficult and can further strain relationships; allowing landlords to have more authority over water regulation could put renters in more difficult situations, such as more frequent inspections; the recommended programs should not add additional stress for renters nor justify rent increases; property managers often “give up” trying to encourage renters because they feel they cannot control what their tenants do

*“Finding ways to incentivize savings for renters and landlords for their mutual benefit is a longstanding challenge. Many examples of waste continue because no one will take the initiative to fix them.”*

*“Key here is ensuring that renters get at least some of the benefits of conservation efforts and finding ways to have the dollars saved get back to renters instead of just improving the bottom line for the building owner.”*

*“Renters and owners can pass responsibility between each other and avoid solving the problem. Education and incentive for both can clarify the role that everyone plays in water conservation.”*

**Pushback:** previous attempts to perform leak detection audits and install water meters have been received with caution from renters due to the potential for landlords to find other issues with the rental unit or with the renters themselves

**Rate increases:** many participants felt that the potential increase in water rates was not adequately addressed

**Savings:** unless incentives are significant then there is little reason for renters and property owners to perform any efficiency upgrades; if the cost savings are not passed down to the renters from their landlords then there is no direct benefit in conserving water for renters

*“It can be difficult to get people to care about the water bill without any incentive or goal they can get behind.”*

Other suggestions to increase participation and uptake for the recommended programs include:

- Address language barriers for new Canadians
- Annual inspections of rental properties to encourage water efficiencies
- Communication campaign via social media, local bloggers, and news agencies
- Create videos or an easy-to-use app that tracks water use
- Hold information seminars and presentations at the Water Treatment Facility
- Include information in monthly water bills
- Keep information simple and easy to access
- Lower water rates at night and during off-peak times
- Offer courses and training on how to make efficiencies in your home or business
- Provide information specific to new homeowners and renters
- Reduce all associated costs
- Use different communication opportunities to spread the word to the diversity of residents
- Use newsletters and industry meetings to get information to property owners and managers
- Work with community-based organizations, such as the Open Door Society

### **General Considerations**

Considerations from previous engagement activities were provided for the public to provide further feedback on, including educational programming, the City leading by example, exploring grey water system opportunities, and the recommended programs and phasing. Comments were provided by respondents and summarized within the following themes:

**Control:** some respondents expressed their concern for the programs providing the City with additional control measures

*“I think these opportunities listed are a way to intrude on people to try to control them. Are the new “meters” going to turn into a way to control how much water would come to your home.”*

**Costs:** many respondents identified that costs for water and living in Saskatoon are already high and that any added costs should be minimal or entirely removed; unexplained taxes and fees are a major concern for numerous respondents who called for greater transparency

**Frustration:** some respondents expressed their frustration for the time and costs associated with developing the Strategy and it placing further limitations on the community

**Funding needed for conservation:** some respondents believed that greater funding should be available for conservation initiatives in Saskatoon

**Grey water:** the most commented on theme; there is a lot of interest from respondents in grey water systems being allowed within the City; currently grey water systems are far too restrictive; especially important for industrial, commercial, institutional applications; some respondents were hesitant in providing their support due to the associated pollutants and filtration requirements

*“Allowing grey water systems in homes would be a very valuable opportunity and is a long-term measure for water conservation.”*

**Naturalized parks:** numerous respondents provided their support for more naturalized parks that use less water

**Prioritize:** other City initiatives were identified as either being more important than the Strategy, including the downtown library and roadway maintenance

**Support:** many respondents expressed their support for the recommended programs and considerations; out of the initiatives listed, respondents provided the greatest support for the City leading by example and the current phasing of the recommended programs

*“I think this is reflective of a proactive and forward-thinking team at the City of Saskatoon and as a lifelong resident, I appreciate this approach.”*

**Timing of phases:** the City should ensure the actions created within the Strategy are streamlined so that each phase is efficient since wasted time is wasted water

Other suggestions and potential programs to consider included:

- Develop partnerships with major water users, such as the University of Saskatchewan and local school divisions, to improve overall water efficiency for larger consumers
- Explore water restrictions for lawn maintenance over the summer (ex. alternating days)
- Limit watering of City parks to being as needed and not during periods of rain
- Offer water collection receptacles to residents for free
- Promote green roofs to improve run off, energy efficiency, and collect rainwater
- Reusing water from the annual flushing of City hydrants
- Use rainwater collectors on public buildings to water green spaces

### Final Thoughts

When asked whether the proposed changes described in the survey addressed the concerns respondents might have had with the Strategy and water conservation in Saskatoon, most stated yes (35%) followed closely by somewhat (32%) and no (19%). When asked for further clarification on why they somewhat or did not support the Strategy and recommended programs, respondents provided the following concerns:

Table 3: Reasoning for Not or Somewhat Supporting the Strategy and Recommended Programs

Reasoning	Participants (%)
Costs associated with the program and increasing water rates	41
Water Conservation is not a concern for me or Saskatoon	14
Unneeded bureaucracy and input from the City	11
Will not have a significant impact to the community	9
More information is needed	7
Education can only go so far with little benefits	5
I am already conserving water as best as I can	5
Low income and equity considerations have not been addressed	5
How do you connect with those unwilling to change	2
More focus on industrial, commercial, and institutional sectors is needed	2

When asked whether they were more willing to participate in any of the recommended programs considering the changes to the Strategy, the most common response was yes (45%), followed by being somewhat more likely (31%) and not (13%).

Final comments and suggestions provided by respondents were summarized in the following themes:

**Education:** this was a heavily debated topic throughout the survey with some respondents believing education to be ineffective and a waste of resources while others believe it to be essential for the future success of the Strategy; those that support education overall suggested starting with school divisions first

**Equal treatment:** some participants suggested that all residents, businesses, and industries should participate in the program equally in order for everyone to feel like they are doing their part to conserve water; numerous respondents expressed their concern that industries are not being held accountable for their water use; there is also confusion as to whether the surrounding communities that use Saskatoon's water will be provided the same opportunities and expectations in conserving their water

*"Industrial sector water use needs to be addressed. Water used in manufacturing items such as laundry detergent is one of our biggest water wasters (it's 80% water). Everyone uses laundry detergent and if we keep going after the little guy and not holding corporations accountable we lose the water conservation game."*

*"Many surrounding communities use the water that the COS filters and distributes. Why are they not included? It should be a regional campaign not local."*

*"Focus on programs that apply to everyone - home, work, school. That's how you change habits - make the new behavior change everywhere we are."*

**Expectations:** set reasonable expectations for the amount of water the City expects people to use and at a fair cost; factor in the current limitations and living standards residents are experiencing into the pricing structure

**Incentives:** respondents expressed that currently there are little to no incentives for reducing their water use and that changes will not occur until people are incentivized to do so

**Not a concern for our city:** some respondents stated that water conservation should not be a concern for our City due to the ample supply of water from the South Saskatchewan river

*"I don't feel the city should be concerned about water usage as we have a safe reliable supply that flows through the city all year."*

*"I don't believe that there is a water issue in this city with a river running right through it the city I feel has ample supply of water. The city operations may want to look in the mirror when speaking about water usage instead of looking to scorn citizens for their usage."*

**Positive over negative reinforcement:** numerous respondents felt that if the proposed changes are heading towards punishing users for overuse then this is the wrong approach to take

**Restrictions for watering lawns:** there is a common view that the City should move away from planting grass and start encouraging low-water yards and plant species; encourage more residents to plant drought tolerant and native plants instead of lawns by limiting watering periods

**Support:** many respondents provided their support for the Strategy and recommended programs

*“Great initiative! Thank you for leading this & engaging with the public.”*

*“it’s essential for our wellbeing and that of our future generations. What I am most worried about is the pollution of our river and the drainage of the water before it gets to our city.”*

*“Saskatoon depends solely on the SSR for its water supply. That supply is limited and it will even decrease in years to come. Past us, the SK Inland Delta, needs all the water it can get to fulfill its function as a major carbon sink. If we do not save water on all levels, we simply play with the future of humanity. It is that simple.”*

**Water information:** participants asked whether more accurate information on local water quality and quantity could be shared for the community to be more informed

*“How about a periodic report on the quality of the water in our river, including amounts of mercury and other toxic substances, oxygen levels and mineral levels. This would enroll people in caring about our river. We see it every day but we don’t really know how healthy the ecosystem is.”*

**Water rate increases and service charges:** many respondents identified their concern for water rates increasing if conservation initiatives are successful; there is also frustration over current service charges and the lack of information as to what people are being charged for

*“The costing of water needs to change. There is little financial incentive to lower water use when the service charge is higher than the water usage. Make it so water costs more but the service charge is lower.”*

*“There will be little to no buy in from the community if they see water rates increase at the same time that water usage decreases. This is counter intuitive and provides no savings or incentive for people to get on board. “I’m using less water but I’m paying the same, or even more, what a rip off” is the first thing that will go through the mind.”*

**Why:** further clarification needs to be provided as to what are the reasons the City is looking to reduce overall water consumption; more information is needed in order to create a more informed public

## 3.2 Individual Meetings

A meeting with Renters of Saskatoon and Area was held on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

### 3.2.1 Intended Audience

The Renters of Saskatoon and Area was approached to provide feedback on the opportunities and barriers for renters.

### 3.2.2 Marketing Techniques

Representatives from the organization were contacted directly so no marketing techniques were not used.

### 3.2.3 Analysis

Mixed methods were used to analyze the data. Qualitative methods included the thematic analysis and open coding of responses.

### 3.2.4 What We Heard

#### *General Concerns and Barriers for Renters*

Participants identified that many tenants want to improve their water efficiency, but currently do not have the means to or are unaware of any opportunities. However, many tenants do not see any direct incentives to conserving water; therefore, differences in opinions exist between tenants within a building which could delay efficiencies being made for the entire building. Overall, there should be a lack of demand for renters to adhere to the programs represented in the Strategy, and rather an invitation to connect as best as they can.

Participants expressed their hesitation over water rates increasing if the programs represented within the Strategy are effective. It was suggested that this may be a vehicle for landlords/property managers to raise the rent in a more hidden way or to provide more opportunities for landlords to enter the rental unit to make upgrades when not welcomed by tenants. Historically, when social housing units replaced showerheads and toilets, the process was upsetting since the installation was performed without any consultation with the tenants. It was also suggested that many landlords are not interested in having conversations about water conservation since they tend to focus on debt recovery.

The following suggestions were provided to increase uptake within the renter community:

- Benefits for participating in the programs should be advertised as best as possible
- Focus on relationship building, especially with Indigenous people, to establish trust
- Have support staff available to assist with the program and support tenants to reduce confrontations, especially when delivering information and following-up on efficiencies
- Incentives are important for low-income renters, whether in-kind or products (ex. free showerheads or faucet aerators)
- Start slow, with one tenant in every apartment building that wants to be engaged
- Target non-profit landlords first, especially for pilot programs

When asked how we can better engage renters, participants provided the following suggestions:

- Find other means to advertise initiatives, such as in Indigenous communications and sharing with community organizations (ex. public activity boards)
- Develop relationships with tenant health organizations for better renter-targeted communications
- Incorporate plain language within all forms of communication
- Internet and social media ads are becoming more inaccessible for seniors and newcomers, so focus should be placed on using phones and colourful print materials (do not send via mail though)
- Use renter terminology and wording to target the renter community better

Participants noted that the rental community is currently in crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic and low-income housing crisis, so environmental issues are not a priority at this time. Many non-profit landlords are overwhelmed and stressed due to the low-income housing crisis in Saskatoon.

### 3.3 Youth Workshop

A virtual workshop was conducted on April 21<sup>st</sup> with the Saskatoon Open Door Society's Multicultural Leadership Council. A total of ten participants provided their feedback on three open-ended questions surrounding water conservation in Saskatoon.

#### 3.3.1 Intended Audience

Representatives from the Saskatoon Open Door Society's Multicultural Leadership Council were invited to participate in the two-hour workshop.

#### 3.3.2 Marketing Techniques

Representatives from the organizations were contacted directly so no marketing techniques were not used.

#### 3.3.3 Analysis

Mixed methods were used to analyze the data. Qualitative methods included the thematic analysis and open coding of responses.

#### 3.3.4 What We Heard

When asked what are the best ways to share information with residents regarding water conservation, participants provided the following:

- Access opinion/community leaders in diverse newcomer groups to disseminate information
- Approach school boards
- Conduct townhall meetings and public information sessions
- Emails, texts, mail, leaflets, and telephone messaging
- Explain the benefits of engaging to encourage participation
- Information in water bills and on doors
- Involve community associations and neighbourhood organizations/leadership in grassroots communication
- Neighbourhood newsletters and radio
- Social media channels and neighbourhood social media handles for the community to follow along with

Participants suggested the following when asked how they would help residents take part in the water conservation programs:

- Be honest about the expectations and how people can participate
- Billboards and fun advertisement methods
- Continual awareness program that does not end
- Create a sense of ownership and responsibility through grassroots engagement opportunities
- Door to door engagement opportunities
- Encourage a community approach to projects where individuals feel like they can participate
- Foster community stewardship initiatives, such as "water conservation project champions" or ambassadors
- Highlight the benefits to residents instead of the negatives
- Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into awareness materials
- Offer incentives by rewarding water saving milestones with rebates

- Offer information and forums in the diversity of languages that are represented in Saskatoon to promote two-way communication
- Provide accurate water consumption data to residents and show them how to reduce their consumption
- Recognize neighbours and communities doing a good job conserving water
- Self-awareness is critical for people to get on board with the programs
- Set up pilot projects at Universities and communities to encourage people to participate

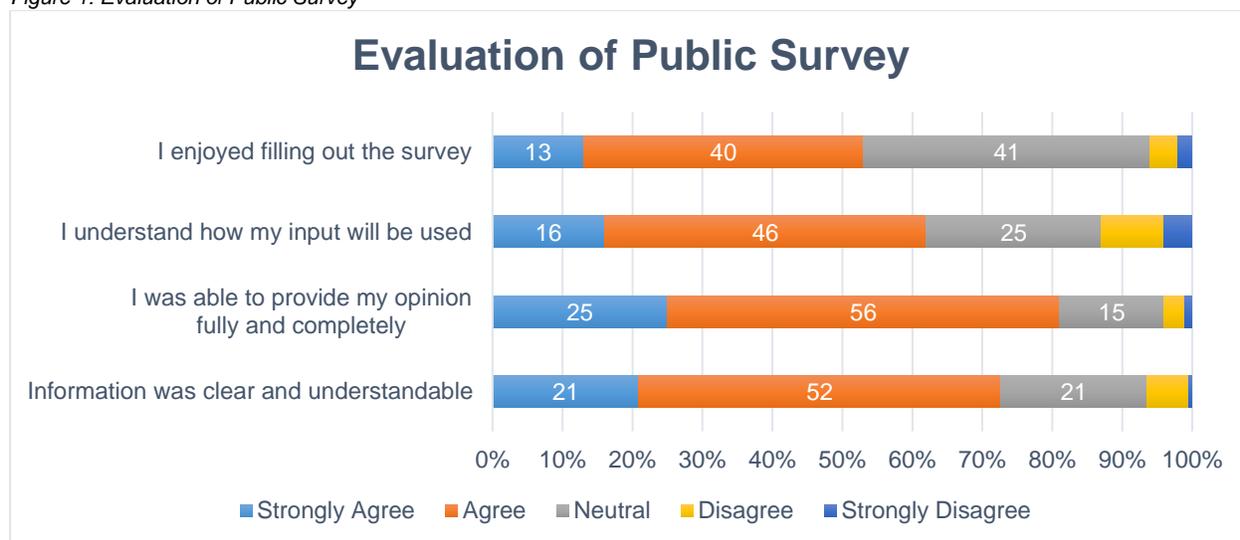
Suggestions for project managers involved in water conservation included the following:

- Focus on language barriers to gain access to a diversity of voices and communities
- Involve students in the discussions and engagement to foster greater stewardship
- Monitoring individual water use is important for people to know where they are at
- Start engaging the community at the onset of the project
- Work with other sustainable and green initiatives, such as saving energy and reducing GHG emissions, to have the biggest impact for the community

### 3.4 Evaluation

Participant evaluation through the survey indicated support for both the level of engagement conducted and the opportunities provided. 73% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the information that was provided being clear and understandable, with 79% feeling they were able to provide their opinions fully throughout the process.

Figure 1: Evaluation of Public Survey



Comments provided by participants were supportive of the process:

*“Thanks for seeking community input.”*

*“We are very excited about topics discussed and programs being developed!”*

*“Keep up the good work!”*

However, some respondents expressed their distrust for City engagement and the methods used:

*“Seems every survey that the city puts out does not listen to participants but just does a survey to make us feel good and goes ahead and does whatever they feel like doing.”*

*“I don’t believe our opinion matters.”*

*“Surveys that the City uses often seemed biased.”*

### 3.5 Data Limitations

Due to the public health orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic, all engagement activities for this project were conducted virtually, which provides further limitations for equity and accessibility groups. Additional considerations for low-income, Indigenous and equity groups will need to be incorporated into future engagement opportunities.

Online engagement has its limitations in not being as inclusive to those individuals with limited to no internet access, including low-income groups. Multiple avenues were available to the public for providing input to help mitigate potential issues of inclusivity due to 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 individual stakeholders.

## 4 Next Steps

The next steps for development of Water Conservation Strategy are described below:

- Identify benefits and barriers and explore opportunities to enhance initiatives
    - Identify benefits and barriers to water conservation initiatives in Saskatoon.
    - Of the potential initiatives, identify opportunities to enhance benefits and mitigate barriers.
  - Select preferred initiatives to prioritize the Strategy
    - Identify public preference for each initiative to help inform selection of preferred initiatives to prioritize and Plan Options Identification
  - Close the Loop
    - Share relevant components of the Water Conservation Strategy with stakeholders to close the loop and provide opportunities to identify any red flags.
    - Validate key findings and test with wider stakeholder base.
- Report to City Council
    - The final engagement report and recommended programs within the Strategy will be presented to City Council

We Are Here