Water Efficiency Engagement

Report Back: What We Did

March 10, 2026

Project overview

As part of Calgary's Drought Resilience Plan, The City of Calgary is updating its 2005 Water Efficiency Plan. The updated plan sets a renewed strategic direction for managing Calgary's water demand to support a growing city, safeguard long-term water supply, and responsibly steward the rivers we share.

The updated plan will include a suite of policies, programs, and new targets designed to align water demand with water availability in the context of a changing climate and a growing population.

Engagement overview

Engagement was open from November 17 to December 7, 2025. Note that engagement took place the year following the Bearspaw South Feeder Main break and before the feeder main break of December 30, 2025. A dedicated page for the project's engagement was included on the Engage portal on calgary.ca (https://engage.calgary.ca/waterefficiency). The page was open to the public and included information about the purpose of the project, the role of engagement, the project timeline, and two questionnaires: one for Calgary residents answering on behalf of themselves/their household and one for people representing Calgary businesses, industry and community partners. There were 10,663 page visits and 8,848 visitors. There were 1,842 submissions to the Calgary residents' questionnaire and 34 submissions to the Calgary businesses, industry and community partners questionnaire.

Engagement questions were designed to gather participants' input on:

- Challenges and barriers to reducing water use outdoors and indoors.
- Support, tools and information that would make it easier for Calgarians to use less water outdoors and indoors.
- Ways The City can help Calgarians benefit from potential water efficiency programs and tools.
- Water rates to encourage water efficiency among Calgarians (in the residential questionnaire only).
- The proposed Outdoor Watering Schedule.

The What We Heard Report of the engagement findings is available here: Water Efficiency What We Heard Report.

What we heard and what we did

What we heard	What we did
Participants support water efficiency and understand why it matters. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that using water wisely is important, with common motivations including: • Protecting long-term water security • Maintaining healthy rivers and ecosystems • Managing costs related to water treatment and infrastructure • Preparing for drought, climate variability, and system disruptions Across engagement, water efficiency was generally viewed as a necessary and responsible long-term response to growth, climate uncertainty, and system resilience, rather than a short-term or emergency-only issue.	In response, the Water Efficiency Plan: • Establishes a long-term vision and incremental goal (20 per cent per capita reduction by 2040), rather than short-term mandates • Articulates the risks that water efficiency helps manage, and frames water efficiency as a shared system outcome, not solely an individual behavioural issue • Focuses on reducing overall system demand and peak demand pressures while maintaining essential uses These actions reflect that participants support water efficiency when it is evidence-based, transparent, and focused on long-term outcomes, rather than framed as immediate sacrifice or crisis-driven change.
Water efficiency must be fair, practical, and account for different household needs. Many residents and businesses emphasized that: • Households have different needs based on size, health, income, and housing type • Outdoor water use supports trees, gardens, food growing, and urban cooling • Further reductions are difficult for those already conserving • Affordability and equity must be central to any new tools or rules Participants consistently cautioned against approaches that could disproportionately impact large households, renters, or those with limited	In response, the Water Efficiency Plan: • Emphasizes education, incentives, and support programs, rather than relying on regulation alone • Commits to reviewing equity, affordability, and household impacts as part of the process that precedes advancing any rate-based tools • Explicitly acknowledges that achieving water efficiency targets will require coordinated action by The City, residents, and businesses, not household behaviour change alone In response, the proposed Outdoor Watering Schedule:

What we heard	What we did
ability to reduce use further, and stressed that efficiency measures should reflect lived experience.	• Is designed to balance water efficiency with healthy, thriving landscapes by focusing restrictions on peak-demand sprinkler use while maintaining flexibility for essential outdoor watering needs • Provides clear allowances for hand watering, newly planted vegetation, trees, gardens, and edible food crops recognize that efficient water use and vibrant landscapes can – and must – co-exist This approach reflects engagement feedback that water efficiency must be practical, adaptable, and grounded in real-world conditions, and designed to reduce, not exacerbate, existing inequities.
Strong support for education, incentives, and practical tools. Across residential and business engagement, participants consistently asked for: • Practical, Calgary-specific guidance on indoor and outdoor water use • Support for fixing leaks and upgrading inefficient fixtures • Rain barrels, irrigation upgrades, and landscape transformation tools • Programs that work for renters, multi-family buildings, and income-constrained households • Real-time or near real-time water-use data and alerts Participants emphasized that information and tools need to be easy to understand, affordable, and relevant to different housing types and customer circumstances, and that education and incentives should come before more prescriptive approaches.	The Water Efficiency Plan prioritizes: • Expansion of education-first initiatives, including practical, Calgary-specific indoor and outdoor water-use guidance • Continued and expanded rain barrel programs, alongside irrigation efficiency and landscape transformation tools, recognizing rain barrels as a simple, affordable way for Calgarians to reduce outdoor water demand, support gardens and trees, and make use of rainwater that would otherwise run off • Targeted programs – such as the Home Upgrades Program – for Calgarians facing barriers to access, renters, and multi-family buildings, to ensure water-saving tools are accessible across housing types • Leveraging advanced water metering technology to improve access to water-use data, support leak detection, and enable more tailored outreach and education Rather than relying on a single flagship program, the Plan advances a portfolio of supports designed

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	to reduce barriers and enable action across different housing types, income levels, and customer sectors. These actions are reflected in the 2026-2030 Action Plan, with multiple initiatives already underway or in development.
Mixed views on conservation-oriented water rates, with clear conditions. Participants expressed mixed opinions about conservation-oriented water rates: • Some participants supported tiered or shortage-based rates as potentially effective and fair tools for encouraging efficient water use • Others raised concerns about affordability, impacts on large households, renters, and the risk of exacerbating inequities • Many emphasized that essential indoor use, tree care, and food growing should not be penalized • Transparency, education, and clear rationale were repeatedly identified as prerequisites for any future consideration of rate changes Across engagement, participants were clear that rate-based tools should not be advanced without strong evidence that they are fair, understandable, and responsive to different household circumstances.	Rather than implementing immediate changes, The City committed to: • Assessing conservation-oriented rate structures through the Cost of Service Study • Evaluating equity, affordability, and household-size considerations explicitly • Ensure rate structures proposed are suitable for Calgary's specific context • Follow the appropriate pathways, ensuring (as always) that rate decisions are brought forward to Council for approval This measured and evidence-based approach reflects engagement feedback that conservation-oriented rates may be appropriate in the future as part of a multi-dimensional approach to water efficiency, but only if designed carefully, transparently, and with equity at the forefront, offering a pathway to reward conservation behaviour.
Outdoor water management views were mixed, with strong emphasis on clarity, flexibility, and protecting landscapes. Many participants noted that the proposed Outdoor Watering Schedule is generally clear and aligns with existing habits, such as watering in the evening or early morning. At the same time, participants emphasized the need for greater clarity	In response, the proposed Outdoor Watering Schedule has been designed to be meaningful and reasonable by building in clear allowances that directly reflect what we heard: 1. Accessibility and flexibility: Allows hand watering – including use of a hose with a spring-loaded nozzle – any day, any time,

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and flexibility, particularly around how the schedule would apply in practice. Participants highlighted that: • Clearer definitions and examples are needed (including distinctions between hand watering, sprinklers, and drip or soaker hoses) • Clearer guidance is needed for multi-unit properties • Information about enforcement and an education-first rollout should be more explicit • Flexibility is important for shift workers, seniors, and people with disabilities • Outdoor water management should continue to protect trees, gardens, and food crops	addressing concerns about flexibility and accessibility. 2. Supporting landscape establishment: Allows watering newly planted trees, shrubs, and grass any day, any time, recognizing the importance of the early establishment period for vegetation. 3. Supporting food security: Allows watering edible food crops any day, any time, reflecting feedback about protecting food growing and essential outdoor uses. In addition, the Schedule: • Is clearly differentiated from Outdoor Water Use Restrictions (i.e., it is a standing schedule distinct from shortage-stage restrictions). • Includes exemptions for certified Water Managed Sites, and the Plan includes an action to expand the Water Managed Sites program. • Is supported by communications, education, and training rollout, including clearer communications that watering is enabled from 7 p.m. to 10 a.m. Finally, to reinforce City accountability and "leading by example," the 2026–2030 Action Plan sets out specific City commitments and is designed to be reviewed and renewed over time; program materials also describe implementation as a set of 11 actions, with The City leading actions 1 through 7.
Participants expect The City to lead by example. A consistent thread across engagement was the expectation that:	The Water Efficiency Plan places strong emphasis on City leadership and accountability, including: • Accelerating water loss reduction • Modernizing water metering technology

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• The City address water loss, leaks, and infrastructure performance • Municipal operations model efficient water use • Progress be reported transparently over time Some participants expressed frustration or skepticism, particularly where they perceived that: • Residents were being asked to do more before system issues were addressed • Information about leaks or repairs was not visible enough	• Improving system monitoring and reporting • Sharing progress publicly through dashboards and regular reporting The 2026–2030 Action Plan sets out specific City commitments and is designed to be reviewed and updated regularly, enabling continuous improvement and demonstrating The City's ongoing commitment to leading by example. Of the 11 actions in the Water Efficiency Plan, 7 are City-led, reinforcing that The City is taking responsibility for system performance and operational efficiency alongside customer-facing programs. By embedding these City-led actions alongside supports for residents and businesses, the Plan directly reflects engagement feedback that credibility, transparency, and trust are foundational to achieving long-term water efficiency.

Next steps

The Water Efficiency project team will review and finalize the Water Efficiency Plan and proposed Water Utility Bylaw amendments, informed by what was heard through public and industry engagement. Engagement feedback will continue to guide implementation priorities, with particular attention to education, equity, affordability, and practical support for residents and businesses.

Pending Council consideration, The City will begin short-term implementation actions, including targeted communications, education, and program delivery to support water-efficient practices. Progress will be monitored through existing reporting and dashboard tools, with future updates aligned to City business planning and budget cycles.