



Append 1- Summary of Public Engagement Sessions.docx

Summary of Engagement Report
November 9, 2022



Summary of Engagement Report

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](#)¹.

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 practice 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, available upon request. 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

¹ During engagement the terms affordability, assistance, low-income support, and savings were used synonymously to describe a potential program.

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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

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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

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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.