

Planning & Development Services Report to  
Community Development Committee  
2026 April 01

ISC: UNRESTRICTED  
CD2026-0150

## **Water Efficiency Plan and Update to the Water Utility Bylaw**

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### **PURPOSE**

This report presents the updated Water Efficiency Plan for Council's approval. The Water Efficiency Plan sets a clear direction for managing Calgary's water use, ensuring there is enough water for a growing city and protecting our rivers. It also introduces proposed amendments to the Water Utility Bylaw (Bylaw 40M2006, the "Bylaw"), including the introduction of an Outdoor Watering Schedule.

### **PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION**

Updating the Water Efficiency Plan was directed by Council during approval of the Drought Resilience Plan (CD2023-0756) on 2023 October 17. Council approved the 30-in-30 Water Efficiency Plan (UE2005-56) on 2005 December 12. Attachment 1 further outlines previous Council direction.

### **RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That the Community Development Committee recommend that Council:

1. Approve the Water Efficiency Plan (Attachment 2).
2. Give three readings to the proposed bylaw to amend Bylaw 40M2006, the Water Utility Bylaw (Attachment 5).
3. Direct Administration to consider the required operating and capital investment needed to enable this report (CD2026-0150) in the prioritization of investments for the 2027-2030 Business Plans and Budgets (Attachment 8).

### **CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS**

General Manager Debra Hamilton concurs with this report. The updated Water Efficiency Plan will help ensure a reliable water supply for residents and businesses, supports sustainable growth, and protects the city's rivers.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Calgary's water security is increasingly at risk due to a limited water supply, rapid population growth, aging infrastructure, and a changing climate.
- Water efficiency manages risk by strengthening water infrastructure and service reliability, while managing growth pressures, supporting quality of life, building drought resilience, and protecting the Bow and Elbow Rivers.
- The Water Efficiency Plan sets a renewed direction for managing Calgary's water demand, with a goal to reduce per-capita water demand by 20 per cent by 2040 through shared action by The City of Calgary (The City), residents, and businesses.
- The Plan outlines actions that enable The City to lead by example by reducing water loss, updating water meters, expanding water efficiency programs and incentives, and developing guiding policy.
- The proposed Bylaw amendments include a year-round Outdoor Watering Schedule, to reduce peak summer demand and support reliable water service delivery.

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- Public and industry engagement informed the Water Efficiency Plan and Outdoor Watering Schedule, showing broad support for water efficiency and highlighting the importance of education, incentives, affordability, and clear City leadership.
- In 2026, select Water Efficiency Plan actions are being accelerated in direct response to the independent review panel's High Priority Action Report (HPAR), enabled through the Water Transformation to reduce system pressure during water infrastructure construction and transition periods, lowering the likelihood and severity of service disruptions.

### DISCUSSION

Managing water demand is essential to ensure residents and businesses have reliable water services within the context of a limited water supply, rapid population growth, aging infrastructure, and a changing climate. A renewed Water Efficiency Plan (Attachment 2) helps Calgary make the most of every drop of water. It supports the efficient use of existing infrastructure, optimizes infrastructure investments, and reduces the risk of service impacts. By focusing on water demand management, Calgary strengthens operational flexibility and protects water supply, the infrastructure that delivers it, and the wellbeing of Calgarians. While Calgary achieved significant reductions in per-capita water demand under the 2005 Water Efficiency Plan, overall water demand is starting to rise and water efficiency gains have plateaued.

The Water Efficiency Plan sets a water-wise vision for 2050, with a goal to reduce per capita water demand by 20 per cent by 2040. Informed by engagement with the public, industry, and a cross-departmental advisory committee, The Plan outlines 11 actions to reduce water demand through water efficiency and includes targets for total and residential per capita demand, peak day demand, river withdrawals, water loss, and water meter technology replacement.

Achieving the goal and targets will require coordinated action by The City, Calgarians, and the industrial, commercial, and institutional (ICI) sector. The 11 actions form a cohesive package, building on existing City commitments – such as to reduce water loss and update metering technology – while advancing education, incentives, bylaw standards and efficiency opportunities in the ICI sector (see Attachment 3).

Progress across all actions is required to reach targets, with implementation reviewed regularly through business planning and budgeting cycles.

Administration is also accelerating water demand reduction efforts in 2026 as a part of the Water Transformation Program, to help The City, residents, and businesses reduce water use during a year of high priority infrastructure repairs and potential supply constraints (see Attachment 7). Many of these actions will advance the Water Efficiency Plan.

To meet the targets in the Water Efficiency Plan, Administration is proposing amendments to the Water Utility Bylaw (40M2006), summarized in Attachment 6. These include:

Updates to Schedule E (Outdoor Water Use Restrictions)	Extended sprinkler hours for multi-family and ICI sites and consistent permissions for watering methods. This builds on Council-approved amendments in March 2025 by further clarifying allowable watering activities.
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Introduction of an Outdoor Watering Schedule	The proposed year-round schedule sets outdoor watering days and times for Calgarians. See Attachment 6 for details and exemptions.
Updates to Low Water Use Fixtures Requirements	Updated requirements for showerheads, residential lavatory and kitchen faucets, and commercial pre-rinse spray valves for new builds and renovations, to align with the National Plumbing Code or market standards.
Updates to Outdoor Water Use Restrictions	Authorizing the Director, Water Services to discontinue water service to Customers who do not comply with Outdoor Water Use Restrictions.
Addition of Director Authority to Issue Stop Use Orders	Allows the Director, Water Services and the Director, Community Planning to issue orders to Customers to cease or restrict using water in circumstances where the bylaw already authorizes those Directors to discontinue or shut off water service.

**EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dialogue with interested parties was undertaken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/interested parties were informed     | <input type="checkbox"/> Public communication or engagement was not required        |

Administration conducted public engagement on the Water Efficiency Plan and Outdoor Watering Schedule from 2025 November 17 to December 7. Engagement is summarized in a *What We Heard* report (Attachment 4). Feedback showed broad support for water efficiency, strong interest in education and incentives, and mixed views on potential rate-based strategies, with concerns about equity and affordability. Insights from customer opinion research (conducted in Q4 2023, Q1 2024, Q4 2025), as well as engagement undertaken in support of the 2023 Drought Resilience Plan, provided additional context.

From 2024 September to 2025 December, Administration engaged industry stakeholders including the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), Landscape Alberta Nursery Trades Association (LANTA), the Canadian Prairie Chapter of the Irrigation Association (CPCIA), urban food growers, and the Climate Resilient Communities working group. Industry stakeholders expressed overall support for the Water Efficiency Plan, and a desire for clear City leadership to reduce water loss.

For the Outdoor Watering Schedule, public and industry feedback emphasized the need for flexibility to support landscape health, accommodate shift workers, and ensure allowances for hand-watering at any time. The irrigation sector also noted that approving the schedule before the May watering season is critical to allow residents and businesses time to program irrigation systems and avoid added costs or business disruptions. Most engagement participants found the Outdoor Watering Schedule straightforward and refinements – such as clearer

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definitions and improved communications tools – make it easier to understand. There was also support for an education-first approach to the Schedule's initial rollout.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Social**

Access to safe, reliable drinking water is essential to public health and quality of life. Advancing water efficiency supports reliable service delivery, reduces vulnerability to water shortages, and supports long-term city building in a drought prone region. Expanding the reach of City programs will help Calgarians adopt efficient water practices indoors and outdoors. The introduction of an Outdoor Watering Schedule will require a shift in outdoor water use habits; however, this type of conservation behaviour has been normalized through other neighbouring municipalities having already adopted similar approaches.

#### **Environmental**

Water efficiency strengthens drought resilience by reducing demand on limited water supplies and supports healthy river flows and the aquatic environment by responsibly managing river withdrawals. The Bow and Elbow Rivers are critical for a growing Calgary and area, and managing demand also helps mitigate regulatory risks associated with minimum flow requirements. The Water Efficiency Plan also supports the transition to more drought-tolerant landscapes that are more resilient to heat and variable moisture in a changing climate.

#### **Economic**

Water efficiency helps control long-term costs by optimizing infrastructure investments. For example, reducing water loss ensures that treated and distributed water is used efficiently. Managing water demand supports City-building by ensuring reliable water services for residents and businesses as Calgary grows. Customers also benefit from water efficiency programs that help them find water savings indoors and outdoors. Future research on tiered or conservation-oriented rate structures and shortage surcharges will focus on supporting affordability while encouraging conservation and reducing long-term system costs.

#### **Service and Financial Implications**

##### **2027 – 2030 Business Plans and Budgets**

Attachment 8 outlines financial implications for each of the 11 actions in the Water Efficiency Plan – some actions have been funded through previous approvals; others will be brought forward through the 2027-2030 business plans and budgets. There are no direct changes to water utility rates for 2026 tied to this report. The plan includes an action to pursue conservation-oriented rate structures; a common practice in other jurisdictions to encourage and reward efficient water use. Any future rate recommendations will follow a rigorous cost of service study, with options presented to Council in Q4 2026, as part of the proposed 2027-2030 budget.

### **RISK**

Without an updated Water Efficiency Plan, The City lacks a coordinated framework for long-term water demand management. Without effective demand management, peak water use increases

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the need for expensive treatment and distribution expansions. Water efficiency allows for conservation-oriented infrastructure investment, while reducing the risk of not meeting peak demand prior to planned infrastructure expansions.

There is an economic risk if long-term water supply constraints erode investor confidence and limit the ability to attract economic growth. A secure water supply is essential for City-building.

There is also a reputational risk if The City is seen as failing to be a responsible water steward. Demonstrating action to manage water demand is a necessary complement to advocating for upstream water supply infrastructure from the Provincial government.

No significant risks have been identified with the proposed updates to the Bylaw, provided communications clearly convey the intent and scope of the changes. The City will require early operational alignment across services and clear, consistent communications to maintain public confidence during implementation of the Outdoor Watering Schedule.

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Water Efficiency Plan
3. Water Efficiency Plan – Plan on a Page
4. Water Efficiency Engagement – Report Back: What We Heard
5. Proposed Wording for a Bylaw to Amend Bylaw 40M2006, the Water Utility Bylaw
6. Summary of Amendments to Water Utility Bylaw 40M2006
7. Demand Management in 2026
8. High-level Budget Estimate for the Water Efficiency Plan (2027-2030)
9. Presentation

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Debra Hamilton	Planning & Development Services	Approve
Nicole Newton	Climate and Environment	Approve
Nancy MacKay	Water Services	Approve
Doug Morgan	Operational Services	Consult
Michael Thompson	Infrastructure Services	Inform
Kathy Davies Murphy	City and Regional Planning	Inform
Teresa Goldstein	Community Planning	Inform
Ryan Vanderputten	Capital Plan and Business Services	Inform