



2022 WATER CONSERVATION REBATE PROGRAM REPORT

Issue

A summary report of the 2022 Water Conservation Rebate Program, including the Xeriscape Program and Water Smart Business Grant, is provided to Council for information.

Motion Proposed by Administration

That the 2022 Water Conservation Rebate Program Report be received as information.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

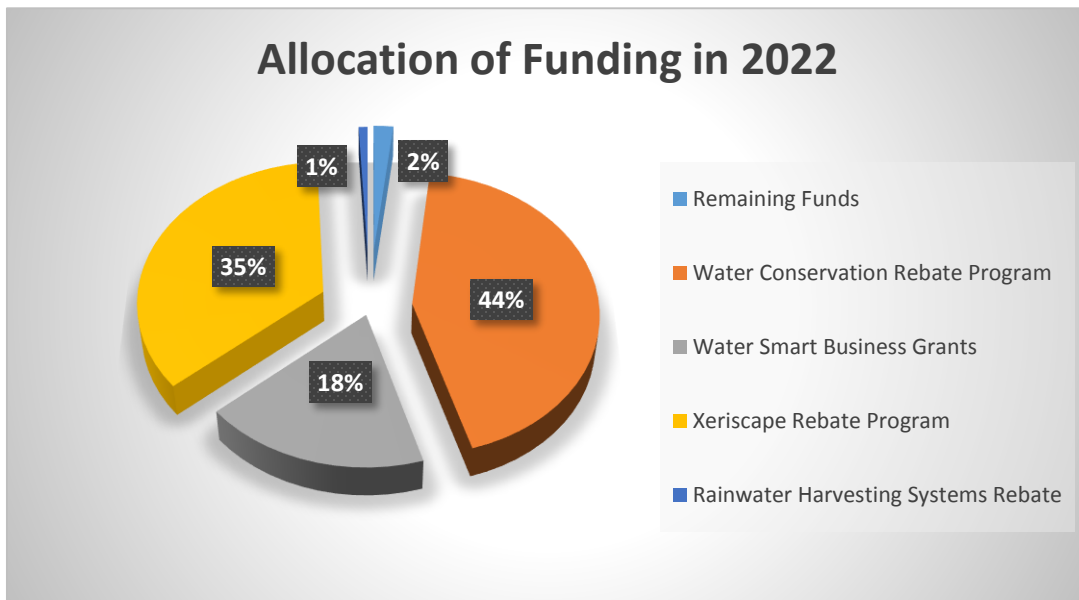
The Water Conservation Rebate Program (WCRP), which includes the Xeriscape Rebate Program and the Water Smart Business Grant program, offers Okotoks' residential and commercial utility customers incentives to reward their water conservation efforts. The third tier charges from the water utility fees provides annual funding for the programs in the amount of \$90,000 (which is used for the grants and advertising of the program).

At the beginning of the calendar year, there is \$40,000 allocated for the Water Smart Business Grant program, and \$25,000 each to the Xeriscape and Water Conservation Rebate programs. If the business funding is not completely used, as in 2022, the remaining funds are used for the residential programs, attempting to balance the demand for xeriscape projects in the spring with the anticipated rebates for water conserving items over the summer. Due to the program's structure, the number of participants per year can vary widely.

The WCRP's rebate structure was updated in 2022 in order to provide more funding to residents who desired to conserve water in their homes and yards. The goal of the restructure was to be able to incentivize the purchase of items that are more costly to a homeowner but also have the potential to conserve more water than other items. In previous years, the program provided 50% of the cost of any of the items up to \$200 per home per year. Instead of having a cap on the overall dollar amount per household, the program in 2022 capped the dollar amount *per item per household*. An example of the new funding model in action is the rebate for drought tolerant turf. The program rebates 50% of the cost up to \$1000 for certified turf that requires only 50% of the water needed by standard Kentucky Blue Grass. The rebate helps to cover the increased cost of the drought tolerant turf and provides an incentive to the homeowner for their turf purchase. The program aims to see an increase in new home builds installing this turf for landscaping so that these yards are saving water from the start. Of the total applications received for drought tolerant turf in 2022, 50% of the applications were for landscaping new home builds.

In 2022, the program awarded 98% of the available grant funds to 380 residents and 3 businesses. This is an increase of 43% from the funds allocated in 2021.

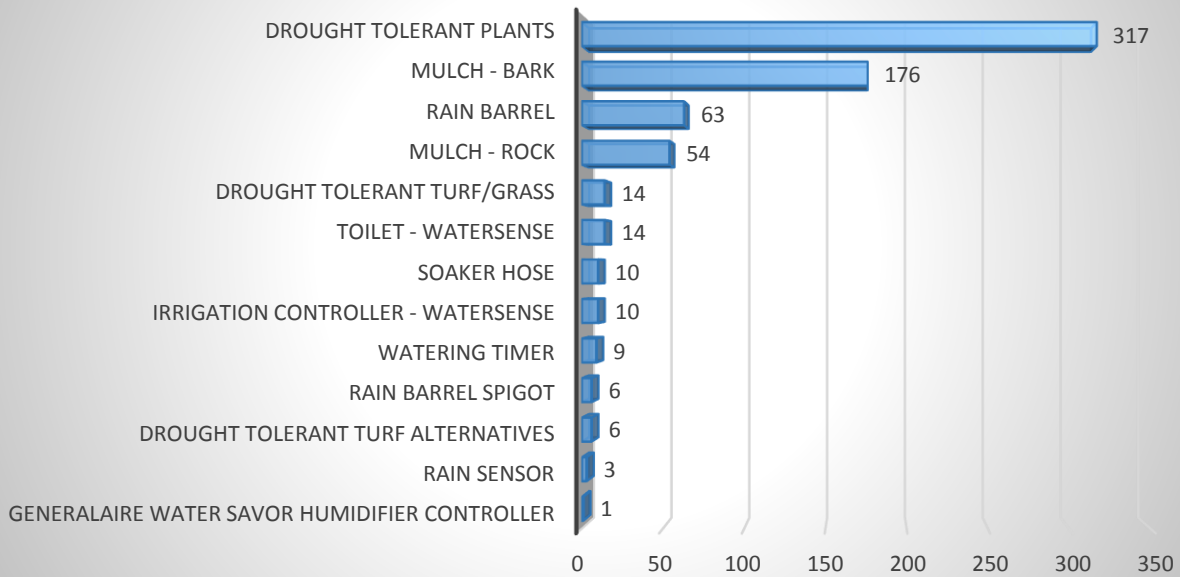
Allocation of Funding in 2022



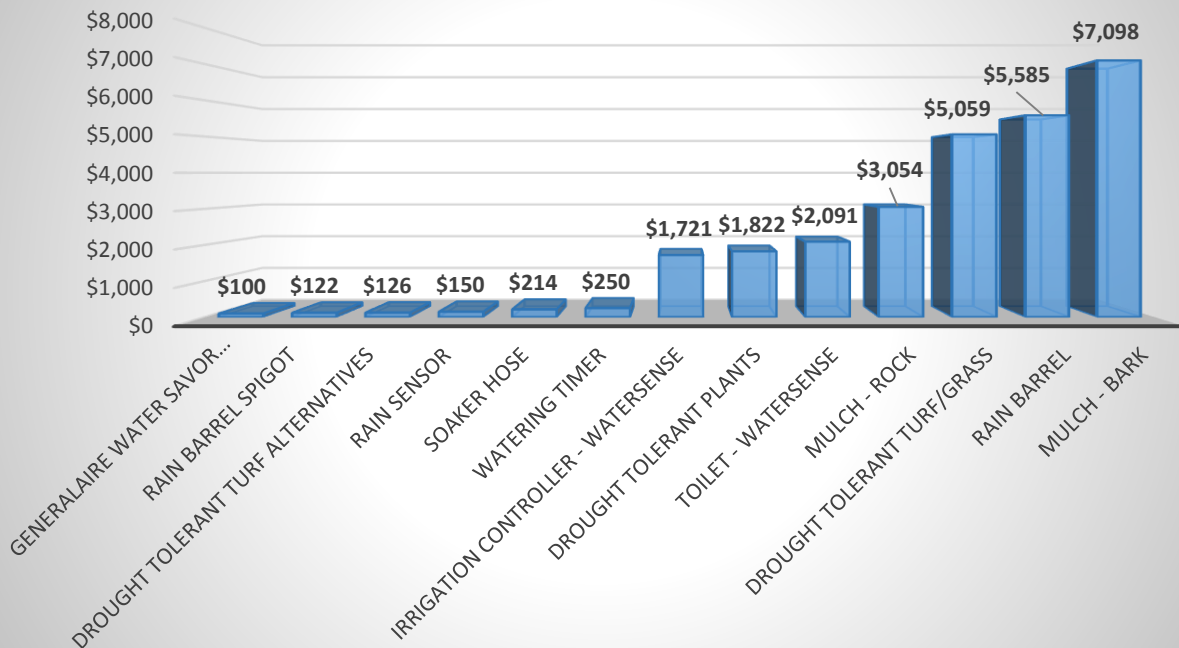
The Water Smart Business Grant program had its inaugural year in 2022 and has already begun for 2023. Of the total rebate dollars available, the Business Grant program used 18% of the funding. Two businesses and one group of multi-family residential units applied for grants. Each of the grants was awarded for indoor plumbing upgrades to WaterSense labeled products. These products are estimated to decrease water use by over 50%. Installed items included one commercial water faucet and spray nozzle, and twenty-five water efficient toilets. The spray nozzle will use 57% less water than the model that was replaced, and each toilet will save 8.2 litres of water, or 63% less water, per flush.

In 2022, the Water Conservation Rebate Program provided 44% of the overall available funding to residential utility account holders. The program received 369 applications for funding, an increase of 38% from 2021. New applicants, who had never applied to the program before, made up 49% of the submissions. The most common items that received a rebate were bark mulch, drought tolerant plants, and rain barrels. In addition to the WCRP rebates, one application for a rainwater harvesting system rebate was received in 2022. The installed system has a 2000 litre capacity and is set up to irrigate a residential garden.

Totals per Item Receiving Rebate



Total Rebate Funds per Item



In a collaboration with Parks Services, the 2022 program was able to offer additional funding for drought tolerant trees. The additional funding was contributed in an effort to add more trees to the private tree canopy in Okotoks. The campaign was called *Raise the Canopy*. The applicant could receive up to \$100 for the full cost of a tree, and 50% up to \$100 for the remainder of the cost if the cost was over \$100. One tree per utility account was permitted. Sixty-one (61) trees received Raise the Canopy

funding and 71 were rebated overall. This is a 53% increase from the number of trees purchased in 2021. This addition to the overall program will be continued in 2023.

2022 was the fifth year that the Xeriscape Rebate Program has been offered. Eleven homes participated in the program, four of which were new home builds with no prior existing landscaping. 35% of the overall water conservation program funding was allocated for xeriscape rebates. The funding continues to be \$3000 per household for the cost of plants, mulch, soil amendments, equipment rentals, and labour. A total combined area of 1154m² was xeriscaped through the program this summer. This is approximately the size of two high school gymnasiums. By the end of the summer, the waitlist for the program had grown to fifteen homes. Each of the waitlisted homes were contacted and encouraged to apply to the 2023 program on March 1st.

In order to measure the water savings of the xeriscaped yards, a two year window is provided after the install of the landscaping in order for the plants to mature (become established) and have a lower need for water. A total of 32 yards, inclusive of 2018-2020, are now considered established. As a whole, these yards are showing water savings of 125,924 litres of water during the summer of 2022. This is the equivalent of 666 rain barrels full of water. As more yards become established each year, the overall water savings will continue to grow.

The 2023/24 program is already undergoing some changes in order to see further water savings. Administration is looking into the possibility of offering water audits to commercial water utility customers as part of the Water Smart Business Grant program. Offering water audits would provide customers with a list of ways to save water within business operations, and the ability to prioritize retrofits for higher water using systems. The second change relates to the residential rebate offerings. Okotoks residents will see a change in the drought tolerant perennials and shrubs list. This year only the drought tolerant native perennials and shrubs listed in the Traditional Knowledge and Land Use Assessment (TKLUA) will be available for a rebate. The change in the drought tolerant plant list will be in keeping with Recommendation seven (7) in the TKLUA.

Strategic Plan Goals

<input type="checkbox"/>	Responsibly Managed Growth	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrated Environmental Leadership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong Local Economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced Culture & Community Health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizational Excellence		

Equity/Diversity/Inclusivity Impacts and Strategy

The Water Conservation Rebate Programs are available to all persons and businesses in Okotoks that have a utility account. This includes both owners and renters.

Environmental Impacts

The Water Conservation Rebate Program will positively impact the environment in Okotoks by increasing rainwater capture, and decreasing outdoor potable water use which also decreases Green House Gas outputs from the water treatment plant. Another positive impact includes supporting biodiversity in Okotoks' ecosystem by providing habitat and food sources for insects and invertebrates, birds, and various mammals.

Public Participation Strategy

The public were informed about the available rebate programs through the Town website, LED signs, and social media accounts, through the various facets of the Conservation Education program, and through printed material distributed throughout Town facilities and plant nurseries. Due to the launch of the Water Smart Business Grants, letters were delivered to all businesses in brick and mortar buildings.

Alternatives for Consideration

n/a

CAO Comments

This report highlights the impacts of the Water Rebate Program and the planned future program enhancements.

Attachment(s)

n/a

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January 04, 2023