

Proposed Incentive Pilot Programs to Collect and Manage Stormwater on Private Property in Support of Climate Resilience

Date: September 12, 2025

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Around the world, extreme weather events have become more frequent, intense, and severe due to human-caused climate change. In the last 20 years, Toronto has seen at least four intense storms that have exceeded the 100-year storm, which historically has a one percent chance of occurring in any given year. These storms have caused widespread flooding and power outages and have disrupted transportation, City services, and people's daily lives. While annual precipitation and extreme precipitation events are anticipated to increase in Toronto, the total number of dry days in a year is also expected to increase, leading to increased water consumption, likely the result of increased watering of gardens and lawns.¹

When correctly installed and properly maintained, green infrastructure can reduce localized flooding by capturing water from small, frequently occurring storm events. For the purposes of this report, green infrastructure refers to either landscape solutions that help manage stormwater by improving water infiltration (e.g., rain gardens, permeable pavement, soakaway pits, etc.²) or solutions that collect and store limited amounts of stormwater, such as rain barrels, that collect rainwater from eavestroughs that can be

¹ Toronto's Current and Future Climate: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/949f-TorontosCurrentandFutureClimate-REPORT-Final.pdf>

² For the purposes of the pilot program, the following definitions apply:

Permeable Pavement: A type of hard surface such as permeable interlocking pavers or porous asphalt or concrete that allows runoff to seep into and between the paving materials and be absorbed into the ground; *Rain Gardens:* Sunken planting beds, often incorporating native perennial species, with highly permeable and nutrient-rich soils that collect, absorb, and treat runoff from roof downspouts, driveways, and parking areas; *Soakaway Pits:* Underground storage systems that receive stormwater runoff on a property and allow it to be absorbed into the ground. They are typically lined with geotextile fabric and are filled with granular stone or other materials that allow water to travel through the pit.

used for watering lawns and gardens, thereby offering other benefits such as water conservation.

This report provides a response to the following Council directives:

- A plan to implement a green infrastructure incentive program for private property, including subsidized rain barrels (2025.EX20.12³).
- The feasibility of implementing a grant program to support property owners in enhancing green stormwater infrastructure features on their property to improve stormwater management (2025.IE20.7⁴).

This report outlines the program design rationale, proposed implementation frameworks, and resource requirements to develop and operate two new incentive pilot programs to collect and manage stormwater on private property in Toronto, and reports on potential next steps for ongoing enhancement of program supports for incentivizing green infrastructure in the city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry recommends that:

1. City Council direct the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry to implement a one-year pilot program to provide rain barrels and downspout diverters to Toronto residents at subsidized rates for collecting stormwater on private property as outlined in Attachment 1 (Implementation Framework for the Program to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater on Private Property) to the report (September 12, 2025) from the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry, provided that the necessary resources for the Program to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater on Private Property are included in the 2026 Budget.
2. City Council direct the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry to implement a three-year pilot program to incentivize green infrastructure for managing stormwater on private property, by establishing a Certificate Rebate for Landscape Professionals and a Design Rebate for Property Owners, as outlined in Attachment 2 (Implementation Framework for the Program to Incentivize Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater on Private Property) to the report (DATE OF REPORT) from the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry, provided that the necessary resources for the Program to Incentivize Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater on Private Property are included in the 2026 and future years Budget.
3. City Council direct the Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry to report back by the end of 2028 on the implementation of the Program to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater on Private Property and of the Program to Incentivize

³ <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EX20.12>

⁴ <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE20.7>

Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater on Private Property, including the effectiveness of program administration and the uptake by residents and landscape professionals, and provide recommendations and resource requirements for the possible continuation of the programs and/or implementation of additional incentives to further support the installation and maintenance of green infrastructure to collect and/or manage stormwater on private property in Toronto.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The proposed implementation of the two incentive pilot programs to collect and manage stormwater on private property in Toronto is expected to result in estimated annual increases to the City's Budget of \$0.387 million gross and net in 2026 including 1.0 full-time employees (FTE) reflecting targeted hiring in the second half of 2026; \$0.505 million gross and net in 2027 including 2.0 FTE (full year impact); \$ 0.855 million gross and net including 2.0 FTE in 2028; and \$0.805 million gross and net including 2.0 FTE in 2029. Additional details are provided in Table 1.

Any financial impacts arising from the proposed implementation of the two incentive pilot programs to collect and manage stormwater on private property in Toronto will be treated as a new investment or enhancement to an existing program to be considered against other City competing priorities during the 2026 and future Budget processes, as required.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

Table 1: Estimated Cost for the Incentive Pilot Programs to Collect and Manage Stormwater on Private Property in Toronto

Year	Staff Resourcing*		Communications and Outreach	Incentives	Annual Total	
	\$	FTE*			\$	FTE*
Pilot Program to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater						
2026 (Q2 launch; FTE hired Q3)	\$16,500	0.12	\$15,000	\$225,000	\$256,500	0.12
Pilot Program to Incentivize Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater						
2026 (FTE hired Q3)	\$115,000	0.88	\$15,000	\$0	\$130,000	0.88
2027 (Q2 launch)	\$260,000	2.00	\$45,000	\$200,000	\$505,000	2.00
2028	\$260,000	2.00	\$95,000	\$500,000	\$855,000	2.00
2029	\$260,000	2.00	\$45,000	\$500,000	\$805,000	2.00
Total						
2026	\$131,500	1.00	\$30,000	\$225,000	\$386,500	1.00
2027	\$260,000	2.00	\$45,000	\$200,000	\$505,000	2.00
2028	\$260,000	2.00	\$95,000	\$500,000	\$855,000	2.00
2029	\$260,000	2.00	\$45,000	\$500,000	\$805,000	2.00
2026 to 2029	\$911,500	-	\$215,000	\$1,425,000	\$2,551,500	-

*FTE is prorated by month.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Impact Assessment of the Program to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater on Private Property

Staff utilized the Equity Lens Tool to assess the potential impact of the rain barrel subsidy program on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving groups of Toronto. The program will somewhat improve residents' ability to reduce their water bills during the summer months and increase access to information about the benefits of water efficient landscaping. This program has the potential to support marginalized and disadvantaged individuals who are already disproportionately facing climate change impacts by improving public access to information and providing a subsidy towards purchasing a rain barrel.

All City of Toronto residents are eligible to receive a rain barrel subsidy; however, the program will be most applicable to those who live in single residential buildings, for example a single-detached or semi-detached house or townhouse. Most other buildings such as high- and mid-rise buildings do not have the capability to connect to rain barrels.

The program aims to alleviate physical accessibility concerns by investigating options to offer online sales and provide free home delivery of rain barrels, which will ensure seniors, those with mobility or health concerns, and those without a vehicle are able to take part in the program without needing to pick up a rain barrel in-person. The program design also considers various forms of payment, such as debit, to ensure residents without a credit card are able to purchase a rain barrel.

Tenants are eligible for the rain barrel program but will need to confirm they have the property owner's consent for installation prior to receiving the subsidy. To facilitate communication between tenants and landlords on program requirements, resources will be available on the program website. Many low-income residents may face barriers to participate in this program, as they are more likely to rent their place of residence than own it, and may not have access to the property's green space. Furthermore, residents may still face financial barriers to installing and maintaining rain barrels; addressing this potential issue will be a focus of the program's evaluation and assessment.

To overcome knowledge barriers regarding the proper installation and use of rain barrels, this program incorporates a public engagement plan, with opportunities to develop guidebooks and tutorials to address common questions.

Impact Assessment of the Program to Incentivize Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater on Private Property

The program to incentivize green infrastructure for managing stormwater on private property aims to contribute to climate resilience in Toronto and support the City's efforts to transition to a circular economy. Failure to adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as increased stormwater runoff and flooding, can increase inequity because historically marginalized and vulnerable communities often face disproportionate impacts from climate change due to factors like proximity to outdated public infrastructure, disparities in income levels, and barriers in accessing City services.

By managing limited amounts of stormwater, this program has some ability to improve downstream water quality through managing stormwater, build resilience for communities and the city as a whole, and support circular principles of resource efficiency and environmental protection. However, these benefits may be limited as the proposed program is focused on building green infrastructure industry capacity and reducing the cost of green infrastructure design, which are efforts that may not directly lead to the installation of green infrastructure on private property.

Staff utilized the Equity Lens Tool to assess the program's potential impact on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving groups of Toronto. The program will improve access to education, training, and information on green infrastructure for stormwater management for landscape professionals. This has the potential to assist landscape professionals from marginalized groups who face barriers and discrimination in the industry. This program will build on the success of the City's GreenForceTO program, an equity-focused workforce development pilot program offered by Transportation Services that trains individuals from Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, or those experiencing barriers to employment, to deliver maintenance services for the City's

Green Streets (i.e., roads that include green infrastructure). The program will also begin to support marginalized and disadvantaged individuals already disproportionately facing stormwater impacts by improving public access to information and professional landscaping services to mitigate the impacts. The program's outreach and engagement plan aims to include a tailored approach to reach Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving groups in Toronto, such as advertising in community-driven sources and social media, providing program information in a variety of languages, connecting with external networks, and providing direct outreach through presentations and community events.

Tenants of private properties are ineligible to apply for a rebate for design services for green infrastructure to ensure that changes are not made to the drainage of a property without the owner's involvement. As a result, many low-income residents may not be eligible for this program as they are more likely to rent their place of residence than own. Additionally, the rebate offered through this program may be insufficient for some residents to access design services from certified landscape professionals as these services may cost more than the maximum rebate being offered by the City. Furthermore, residents and neighbourhoods overall may still face financial barriers to install and maintain green infrastructure on their properties to address stormwater impacts. Addressing this potential issue will be a focus of the program evaluation and assessment.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on April 24 and 25, 2025, City Council adopted the report, Basement Flooding Protection Program Status Update (2025.IE20.7), with amendments. In its decision, City Council requested a report back in advance of the consideration of the 2026 Budget on the feasibility of implementing a grant program to support property owners in enhancing green stormwater infrastructure features on their property to improve stormwater management such as: rain gardens, permeable pavement, bioswales, rainwater harvesting systems, French drains, soakaway pits, etc. (<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE20.7>)

On February 5, 2025, City Council adopted the report, Reducing Stormwater Runoff and Mitigating Basement Flooding (2025.EX20.12), with amendments. The Council direction relevant to this staff report is Resolution 2: to report back, no later than the third quarter of 2025, on a plan to implement a green infrastructure incentive program for private property addressing program administration; eligible green infrastructure features, including subsidized rain barrels; subsidy amounts; applicant eligibility and application requirements; refined cost and resource estimates; and potential funding sources for the program. (<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EX20.12>)

At its meeting on July 24 and 25, 2024, City Council provided direction on a range of issues pertaining to reducing stormwater runoff and mitigating flooding (2024.MM20.24). The Council direction relevant to this staff report is Resolution 1: to report to City Council no later than the fourth quarter of 2024 on existing private property stormwater mitigation and adaptation programs offered by the City and their uptake; an assessment Proposed Incentive Pilot Programs to Collect and Manage Stormwater on Private Property in Support of Climate Resilience

of stormwater mitigation and adaptation programs previously offered for private property by the City that have been discontinued; new or discontinued stormwater mitigation and adaptation programs for private property that could be established in the short-term; new or discontinued stormwater mitigation and adaptation programs for private property that will require additional review and planning prior to implementation; and public input into what programs and incentives would provide the most benefit to residential property owners to decrease impermeable surfaces and mitigate runoff.

(<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM20.24>)

At its meeting on April 17 and 18 2024, in consideration of Toronto's Climate Change Readiness: Updates on commitments and a refreshed mandate for coordinating resilience activities (2024.IE12.3), City Council confirmed support for a renewed focus and coordinated approach on climate resilience at the City of Toronto.

(<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE12.3>)

COMMENTS

Background

In the last 20 years, Toronto has experienced an increasing frequency of severe storm events with stormwater, including rain and melted snow, impacting public and private property and the environment. For example, in July 2024, intense rainfall delivered over 100 millimetres of precipitation to parts of Toronto within a three-hour period, resulting in widespread flooding, power outages, and significant disruptions to transportation, municipal services, and people's daily lives. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the 2024 storm cost more than \$940 million in insured damage in Toronto and other parts of southern Ontario.⁵ Due to climate change, extreme precipitation events are expected to continue increasing in frequency, with the maximum total precipitation falling in one day potentially increasing by 8-11% by the 2030s, 13-17% by the 2050s, and 18-27% by the 2080s, depending on the climate scenario.⁶ More rain is also anticipated to fall over short periods – within minutes to 24 hours – increasing the risk of flooding and erosion.⁶

Due to climate change, the number of very hot days with daily maximum temperatures above 30°C and 35°C is also anticipated to increase, leading to increased water consumption, likely the result of increased watering of gardens and lawns. Toronto's water consumption already increases on average by approximately 16% in the warmer months (May to September) as compared to colder months (October to April), equivalent to a total additional supply of 5,400 megalitres per month on average during the warmer months.⁷ This additional potable water, compared to rainwater, is costly and

⁵ <https://www.abc.ca/news-insights/news/summer-2024-shatters-records-for-severe-weather-damage-over-7-billion-in-insured-losses-from-floods-fires-and-hailstorms>

⁶ Toronto's Current and Future Climate: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/949f-TorontosCurrentandFutureClimate-REPORT-Final.pdf>

⁷ Estimated based on data provided by Toronto Water to staff in Environment, Climate and Forestry on the City of Toronto's Total System Monthly Water Consumption between 2019 and 2024

energy-intensive to supply. Part of the demand for this potable water could be replaced with rainwater collected in rain barrels.

When not absorbed into the ground or collected in rain barrels, stormwater runs off hard surfaces into catch basins, flowing through the City's underground pipes to local waterways. As water runs over impermeable surfaces (i.e., surfaces that do not allow stormwater to be absorbed) it picks up oils, grease, fertilizers and other pollutants. When severe storms occur (i.e., high volume of rainfall over a short duration), stormwater can overwhelm the municipal drainage systems, leading to flooding, erosion, and water pollution and can impact City-owned infrastructure. In urban areas like Toronto, extensive impermeable surfaces exacerbate stormwater runoff and the City's existing stormwater management incentive programs (such as the City's PollinateTO program and various Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives for tree planting on private property⁸) provide limited incentives for reducing impermeable surface areas at the ground level (versus at higher levels, like green roofs) for private properties.

Green infrastructure, which encompasses nature-based solutions and human-made elements that provide ecological and hydrological processes to reduce stormwater runoff, can play a vital role in helping the City of Toronto build resilience and readiness to respond to climate change. Green infrastructure, such as rain gardens, permeable pavement, and soakaway pits, thereby have the potential to deliver environmental and social benefits like improved surface water quality, biodiversity, climate adaptation and resilience, and urban cooling.

Green infrastructure can also support the City's transition to a circular economy, which will prioritize resource stewardship to support the health of natural systems and build a stronger, more resilient city. Green infrastructure incorporates principles of the circular economy such as reduce (the consumption of freshwater), reuse (stormwater for landscaping needs), and regenerate (replenishing ground water and restoring the ecosystem with nature-based landscaping). When intentionally designed, green infrastructure can also reuse and repurpose materials such as repurposed barrels for rain barrels and salvaged stone in rain gardens and soakaway pits.

This report proposes two new green infrastructure incentive pilot programs to help Toronto adapt to climate change and support the City in achieving its aspirational goal of becoming the first circular city in Ontario.

Rationale for the Design of the Incentive Programs to Collect and Manage Stormwater on Private Property

In February 2025 (2025.EX20.12), Council directed staff to report back on a plan to implement a green infrastructure incentive program for private property. Additionally, Council requested that a rain barrel subsidy be considered in the report back. In April 2025 (2025.IE20.7), Council also directed staff to report back on the feasibility of

⁸ PollinateTO program (<https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/environmental-grants-incentives/pollinateto-community-grants/>); Urban Forestry Grants & Incentives (<https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/environmental-grants-incentives/urban-forestry-grants-and-incentives/>).

implementing a grant program to support property owners in enhancing green stormwater infrastructure features on their property. Informed by the results of public consultation and desktop analysis, staff have designed two new green infrastructure incentive pilot programs:

- **Program to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater**, to be implemented as a one-year pilot followed by evaluation to determine whether the program should continue and/or be enhanced.
- **Program to Incentivize Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater**, including rebates for professional green infrastructure certification and rebates for the design of green infrastructure (such as rain gardens, permeable pavement, and soakaway pits) on private property, to be implemented as a three-year pilot followed by evaluation to determine whether the program should continue and/or be enhanced.

Staff have designed both programs to launch as pilots to raise public awareness about green infrastructure options for private properties, evaluate program uptake and demand, support the development of industry expertise needed for successful implementation, and inform a longer-term approach to green infrastructure in the City.

Rain barrels temporarily store stormwater runoff from building roofs that can be reused for watering lawns and gardens and may provide limited benefits from a stormwater management perspective as compared to other green infrastructure (such as rain gardens, permeable pavement, and soakaway pits). As a result, staff have designed two separate incentive programs to ensure each type of green infrastructure can best deliver their intended impact.

Public consultation on the City's stormwater management incentive programs took place from October 23 to November 5, 2024.⁹ The purpose of the public consultation was to gather public input on which City programs and incentives would provide the most benefit to residential property owners who decrease impermeable surfaces and mitigate runoff. An online survey was the primary method of receiving feedback from the public, which received 766 responses. Most survey respondents (96 percent) were residents of the City of Toronto, with the majority (63 percent) living in single family detached homes. Eighty-eight percent of residential respondents were homeowners, and 11 percent were renters.

The results of the consultation indicated that there is strong public interest in installing green infrastructure on private property in Toronto, and a desire for support from the City to enable this; however, several challenges and concerns were noted with respect to the following:

- **Information:**
 - Residents requested more education and information about specific stormwater management actions, including rain gardens, soakaway pits, pavement removal,

⁹ <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-252193.pdf>

permeable pavement, and rain barrels, specifically around the suitability of each for different property and building types, the amount of space required, risks for basement flooding, and required ongoing maintenance.

- Residents expressed a desire for trained and certified landscape professionals to help inform the decision on which green infrastructure to install on their property and how to maintain it.
- **Cost:** The cost of stormwater management actions can be significant and while grants and rebates are helpful, they may not cover enough of the costs to incentivize property owners to implement them on their property.

Based on desktop analysis, staff identified the need for landscape design companies that are certified in green infrastructure to support correct installation and proper maintenance on residential properties. The effectiveness of any green infrastructure solution is heavily dependent on the unique characteristics of each property, for example the soil type, grading, size, impermeable surfaces, surrounding properties, etc. Achieving green infrastructure benefits on private property requires tailored plans, proper installation, and regular (often yearly) maintenance to ensure that the benefits outweigh the risks.

The results of the public consultation also highlight the demand for landscape companies certified in green infrastructure; however, a preliminary market scan has indicated that Toronto's landscaping industry may not be ready to meet this demand. For example, there are currently 16 landscaping companies in Toronto that employ one or more landscape professionals that have completed Landscape Ontario's Fusion Landscape Professional (FLP) certification (a program that provides training on the design, construction, and maintenance of landscapes that optimize lot level stormwater management and enhance the environment through the use of green infrastructure), with an additional seven registered in Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan, and Markham that may service Toronto residents. This certification rate appears to lag against other comparable markets, such as the City of Ottawa, which has 30 FLP-certified landscaping companies registered in the city.

Staff conducted a review of installation-based incentive programs for green infrastructure offered by other municipalities including, Ottawa, Seattle, and Washington, D.C..¹⁰ These programs provide residents with rebates to lower the cost of installing green infrastructure on their property, such as rain gardens, permeable pavement, and soakaway pits. The review found that these types of incentive programs were implemented in a stepwise approach and based on the results of several years of city-specific research and technical studies. For example, Ottawa's Rain Ready rebates are only available in priority retrofit areas of Ottawa where studies have shown that actions on private property like redirecting downspouts and installing rain gardens are

10 Rain Ready Ottawa rebate program (<https://ottawa.ca/en/living-ottawa/environment-conservation-and-climate/protecting-ottawas-waterways/rain-ready-ottawa/rain-ready-ottawa-rebates>); Seattle RainWise rebate program (<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/wastewater-treatment/programs/rainwise>); Washington, DC RiverSmart Home program (<https://doee.dc.gov/service/riversmart-homes>).

effective ways to manage rainwater. The City of Toronto does not have access to this same level of City-wide technical data and thus it may be premature for the City to offer installation-based incentives to residents before better understanding the need, impacts, and risks of green infrastructure specific to Toronto's context.

Trees are a form of green infrastructure that can absorb and intercept rainfall and thereby reduce the volume and intensity of runoff. Separate incentive programs administered by the City's Environment, Climate and Forestry Division currently exist that support tree planting on private lands and are open to residential property owners.¹¹ The City's tree by-laws regulate tree injury and destruction while promoting maximum tree protection and retention and are currently being updated to address the complex and interrelated challenges of climate change, urban development, and environmental management. As a supplement to the existing tree by-laws, the City is considering the development of an additional incentive program specifically related to tree- and growing space protection.¹² A report back on the review of the City's tree by-laws is expected in Q4 2025 and will include a discussion of incentive programs. While trees are a type of green infrastructure solution that can manage stormwater, the scope of the incentive program being contemplated for trees and growing space will require different considerations and technical expertise to administer than the new incentive program for green infrastructure on residential private property being proposed in this report. Staff advise that each of these programs are necessary to support and build a broad network of green infrastructure across the city that will support climate resilience.

Program Design to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater on Private Property

The program to subsidize rain barrels aims to provide Toronto residents with a low-cost opportunity to collect limited amounts of stormwater on private property and reduce water use. The stormwater harvested in rain barrels can be used by residents to water lawns and gardens, thereby reducing their use of potable water for these purposes. This program will support the City's ongoing efforts to conserve water and promote a sense of environmental stewardship amongst participating residents.

The goal of the program will be accomplished through the following components, detailed further in Attachment 1:

- **Public Education and In-person Engagement**
 - The City will create a new City of Toronto webpage with educational content detailing the importance of water conservation and the benefits offered by rain barrels.
 - The City will prepare and share a guidebook detailing rain barrel best practices, and share communications that showcase residents' testimonials and photos.

¹¹ LEAF Backyard Tree Planting Program: <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/environmental-grants-incentives/urban-forestry-grants-and-incentives/>.

¹² Growing Space for Trees: Protecting and Enhancing the Tree Canopy While Supporting Infill Housing and Addressing Concerns with Iceberg Homes - Proposals Report: <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ph/bgrd/backgroundfile-254819.pdf>.

- Staff will engage residents with a demonstration rain barrel at Community Environment Days.
- **Subsidized Rain Barrel Sales**
 - The City will provide a subsidy of up to eighty percent (80%)¹³ for rain barrels and downspout diverters and will cover all delivery fees, if applicable. Subsidies will be limited to two rain barrels and one downspout diverter per address.
 - The City will administer the program through a qualified supplier procured through the City's procurement process that can offer online sales and home delivery.
 - The City will ensure proof of Toronto residence and confirmation of that the owner consents to install a rain barrel for all sales.

The City intends to launch the program in Q2 2026 as a one-year pilot to align with the start of the warm weather season. The program will run until December 31, 2026 or until the budget is exhausted, whichever comes first. Details on the program and eligibility requirements for the subsidies are provided in Attachment 1.

The program will be monitored throughout its implementation to evaluate its success in achieving the program goals, specifically to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the program's administration.
- Determine if public education efforts, including in-person demonstrations, were sufficient to address decision barriers residents face when deciding if and how to install and maintain rain barrels on their property.
- Obtain feedback from residents, especially equity-deserving residents, interested in installing rain barrels on their properties to understand what key barriers remain to doing so.

The results of the evaluation will inform the report back to Council by the end of 2028 on recommendations and resource requirements for the potential continuation of the program and/or implementation of additional incentives to further support the installation and maintenance of green infrastructure to collect stormwater on private property in Toronto.

Program Design to Incentivize Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater on Private Property

The program to incentivize green infrastructure for managing stormwater on private property by improving water infiltration aims to address critical industry workforce

¹³ As per Council direction to include subsidized rain barrels at a similar subsidy as existing programs such as sump pumps and backwater valves, an 80% subsidy is the same as that offered through the Basement Flooding Protection Subsidy Program for installation of a sump pump or backwater valve [<https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/managing-rain-melted-snow/basement-flooding/basement-flooding-protection-subsidy-program/>].

capacity gaps in the local landscaping sector and public information gaps, both of which are needed to enable residents to correctly install and properly maintain green infrastructure on their property.

Through homeowner education, professional training incentives, and professional design rebates, the program will make it easier for residents to adopt green infrastructure solutions on their property, such as rain gardens, permeable pavement, soakaway pits, etc., that manage stormwater to reduce runoff, mitigate flooding, promote biodiversity, reduce the urban heat island effect, and enhance resilience. This will be accomplished by addressing both supply and demand factors that currently limit the implementation of green infrastructure solutions on private property:

- The proposed program aims to increase the supply of local landscaping professionals qualified to install and provide maintenance and guidance for green infrastructure on private property by providing rebates for obtaining green infrastructure certification.
- The proposed program aims to increase the demand for green infrastructure solutions by educating property owners on green infrastructure for stormwater management and reducing the cost for property owners to hire certified landscape professionals to provide expert, site-specific design services for their property.

The goal of the program will be accomplished through the following components, detailed further in Attachment 2:

- **Public Education and Digital Resource Hub:**
 - Online directory of local landscape companies with certified landscape professionals who have expertise in reducing stormwater impacts with green infrastructure on residential properties.
 - Educational content on stormwater impacts and green infrastructure benefits and solutions, including how green infrastructure can incorporate circular economy principles (such as resource efficiency) and support native species.
 - Practical information for residents related to green infrastructure maintenance, costs, and potential risks.
 - Communications to showcase success stories of green infrastructure across the city and promote climate resilience in Toronto.
- **Certification Rebate for Landscape Professionals:** a rebate of up to eighty percent (80%) of the cost for certification focused on the use of green infrastructure for holistic, systems-based stormwater management on residential properties, to a maximum of \$500 per professional, will be offered to members of the landscape design, construction, and/or maintenance sectors who are residents of the City of Toronto.
- **Design Rebate for Property Owners:** a rebate of up to one hundred percent (100%) of the cost for design services offered by an eligible certified landscape professional who has completed an approved certification course on the use of

green infrastructure for holistic, systems-based stormwater management on residential properties, to a maximum of \$500 per property, will be offered to owners of residential properties within the City of Toronto.

This program will build on the success of the City's Green Streets program, which requires prequalification and training of subcontractors for construction of right-of-way green infrastructure. Additionally, the program will draw from the success of the City's GreenForceTO, an equity-focused workforce development pilot program offered by Transportation Services that trains individuals from Neighbourhood Improvement Areas or those experiencing barriers to employment to deliver maintenance services for the City's Green Streets (i.e., roads that include green infrastructure). Beyond private properties, it is expected that increasing the local landscaping industry's capacity to deliver green infrastructure will also support the City in its efforts to implement green infrastructure on City-owned assets, including streets and parks.

The City intends to launch the program in Q2 2027, after new staff have been hired in 2026 to develop and implement the program as a pilot for three years (i.e., from 2027 through to the end of 2029). Details on the program and eligibility requirements for the above-listed rebate components are provided in Attachment 2.

The program will be monitored throughout implementation to evaluate its success in achieving the program goals, specifically to:

- Determine if public education efforts, including the digital resource hub, and reducing the cost of design services were sufficient to address decision barriers residents face when deciding if and how to install and maintain green infrastructure on their property.
- Determine if an increased number of landscape professionals in Toronto obtained certification focused on green infrastructure solutions for stormwater management on residential properties.
- Determine if landscape professionals are offering more green infrastructure stormwater management solutions after completing certification.
- Determine the extent to which green infrastructure is installed on private property after accessing the design rebate.
- Obtain feedback from property owners interested in installing green infrastructure on their properties to understand what key barriers remain to doing so.

The results of the evaluation will inform the report back to Council by the end of 2028 on recommendations and resource requirements for the potential continuation of the program and/or implementation of additional incentives to further support the installation and maintenance of green infrastructure to manage stormwater on private property in Toronto.

Resource Requirements

As directed by Council (2025.EX20.12), staff have estimated the necessary cost and resources that are required to develop and implement the two new incentive programs proposed in this report. There is limited existing staff resourcing and no funding source available in Environment, Climate and Forestry Division to build and deliver these two new incentive programs. Limited existing staff resourcing in the Environment, Climate and Forestry Division could be made available in order to launch the program to subsidize rain barrels in Q2 2026; however, two new full-time employees (FTEs), anticipated to start in Q3 2026 and contracted until the completion of both programs (i.e., December 31, 2029), will be required to fully develop and implement both programs.

While the cost to develop both pilot programs is generally fixed regardless of the value of incentives provided, the cost to administer the programs will depend on the level of uptake from residents and landscape professionals. Staff estimate that development of each program will require approximately six months of staff time to procure a qualified supplier to provide rain barrels and downspout diverters and develop educational materials, application forms, program procedures, and communications plans. Resourcing estimates for program administration reflect the time required to respond to inquiries, review applications, verify documentation, issue rebates and provide an overall high level of customer service. Staff time is also required to evaluate both programs, including seeking resident feedback. Resource estimates have been based on the estimated number of Toronto residents and landscape professionals eligible for the rebates, and the typical uptake rates for existing City of Toronto stormwater incentive programs.

Staff have estimated that a total incentive budget of \$1.425 million would be required over a four-year period (i.e., 2026 to 2029) to provide subsidized rain barrels and downspout diverters to residents, the certification rebate to landscape professionals, and the design rebate to property owners in Toronto.¹⁴ To implement the proposed one-year pilot program to subsidize rain barrels for collecting stormwater, an incentive budget of \$225,000 is recommended to be included in the City's 2026 Budget submission. To implement the proposed three-year pilot program to incentivize green infrastructure for managing stormwater, an incentive budget of \$200,000 is recommended to be included in the City's 2027 Budget submission (based on a Q2 2027 launch), increasing to an annual incentive budget of \$500,000 per year in the City's 2028 and 2029 Budget submissions. Any additional amount allocated to the two new incentive programs proposed in this report will be considered following program evaluation and report back by the end of 2028. The annual amount provided to Toronto residents, property owners, and landscape professionals is subject to change based on evaluation of program demand and uptake.

¹⁴ This estimated incentive budget is based on the number of residential properties and landscape professionals in Toronto that could be eligible for the proposed incentives and the typical uptake rates for existing City of Toronto stormwater incentive programs, such as the City's Basement Flooding Protection Subsidy Program.

The results of the public consultation held at the end of 2024 indicated that, on average, less than 50 percent (50%) of respondents were aware of the City's existing stormwater management incentive programs (such as the Basement Flooding Protection Subsidy Program, the Eco-Roof Incentive Program, PollinateTO program, and the various Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives for tree planting on private property). This result emphasises the need to invest in effectively promoting the new incentive programs proposed in this report.

Next Steps

Should Council adopt the recommendations of this staff report, the necessary resources for both programs will be recommended for inclusion in the 2026 and future years Budget.

Should Council approve the required budget and staff resources to develop and operate the two new incentive programs proposed in this report to collect and manage stormwater on private property, Environment, Climate and Forestry will launch the program with existing staff to subsidize rain barrels for collecting stormwater on private property in Q2 2026. Two new full-time employees are anticipated to be able to start in Q3 2026 to continue the rain barrel program and also to develop, launch, and operate the program to incentivize green infrastructure for managing stormwater on private property in Q2 2027.

Both programs will be monitored throughout their implementation to evaluate their success in achieving their intended goals, providing opportunities for staff to reassess the annual program budgets based on uptake. Research has demonstrated that green infrastructure cannot be expected to entirely manage stormwater or prevent basement flooding and benefits may only be realized locally, especially when installation is limited to private residential properties. Thus, lessons learned from the implementation of the incentive programs may help inform future additional options for City-wide installation of green infrastructure across all property types in Toronto where appropriate (i.e., on residential and non-residential properties across the City) to reduce stormwater runoff and mitigate flooding. Recognizing that incentive programs offered by other municipalities for installation of green infrastructure have been designed based on city-specific research and technical studies, program evaluation will also determine if there is public support and evidence-based rationale for implementing a more resource-intensive installation-based incentive program for Toronto, including the potential to expand incentives to small-scale commercial properties. These enhancements would be conditional on the availability of staff resources and program budget. Finally, in addition to the program to subsidize rain barrels proposed in this report, staff will continue to explore opportunities to make rain barrels available to Toronto residents at an affordable price.

Staff will report back to Council by the end of 2028 on the implementation of the two programs to incentivize green infrastructure for collecting and managing stormwater on private property, including the effectiveness of program administration and the uptake by residents and landscape professionals, and provide recommendations and resource requirements for the potential continuation of the programs, either as-is or modified to

include additional incentives to further support the installation and maintenance of green infrastructure to collect and/or manage stormwater on private property in Toronto.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Implementation Framework for the Pilot Program to Subsidize Rain Barrels for Collecting Stormwater on Private Property

Attachment 2: Implementation Framework for the Pilot Program to Incentivize Green Infrastructure for Managing Stormwater on Private Property