

ATTACHMENT 3

Circular Economy Road Map Project Overview

The Road Map development project commenced in January 2024 and has delivered a 10-year Strategy (Attachment 1) and a corresponding Implementation Plan (Attachment 2). The Strategy sets the City's ambition, outlines strategic directions and presents actions for the City to take to develop new or improved programs, policies and processes to support Toronto's circular economy transition. The Implementation Plan presents the planned activities, along with the future roles of City Divisions that participated in the Road Map development project. Beyond this, other relevant Divisions within the City may also be engaged to support implementation as required.

The Road Map development project was built around a five-pillar methodology, which includes:

- Consideration of global best practices;
- An outcomes-based focus that identifies specific, feasible, and measurable actions/outcomes;
- Meaningful, equitable, and inclusive engagement to incorporate insights and mobilize action with the City's diverse communities;
- A whole-of-City approach to mobilize interdisciplinary expertise and programmatic and policy levers throughout the municipal government; and
- Consideration of economic prosperity and resilience, to support the development and multiplication of economic opportunities associated with the circular economy.

The Road Map project consisted of four phases which are briefly described below. The public reports summarizing each phase are also published on the [City's website](#).

- **Phase 1: Goal Setting** (January-September 2024) focused on validating and refining prior City work with residents, community organizations and members of the business community, including the 2022 Baseline Study. This phase of work sought to develop a set of guiding principles and a compelling circular economy change story.
- **Phase 2: Issues and Opportunity Identification** (September 2024-January 2025) focused on analyzing key issues and opportunities across three priority sectors (construction, food system and waste diversion and materials recovery). This phase of work sought to develop a current state assessment that identified the specific factors that influence consumption and waste generation.
- **Phase 3: Options Analysis** (January-June 2025) focused on conducting a jurisdictional scan of over 100 global municipalities and 75 other levels of government to identify over 200 potential circular economy actions that could be included in the Road Map. This list was also supplemented with recommendations made by interested parties in Phases 1 and 2. These potential actions were reviewed with subject matter experts and leadership from City Divisions using criteria including initial feasibility, general cost and budget implications, potential and unintended impacts and alignment with other City priorities.

- **Phase 4: Strategy and Implementation Plan** (July 2025-October 2025) focused on developing the 10-year Circular Economy Road Map (Attachment 1) and corresponding 3-year Implementation Plan (Attachment 2) for presentation to Toronto City Council.

Each phase of this Road Map project was delivered using an inclusive and participatory process that involved engaging with interested parties, including residents, community organizations, non-profits, Indigenous organizations, small and large businesses, City of Toronto staff and staff from other jurisdictions.

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC), a public advisory body, was established by the City for this Road Map project to seek out resident insights and feedback in a manner that goes beyond what is possible through surveys and other broader engagement tactics. The CAC was composed of 25 individuals who were recruited through a civic lottery process to be demographically representative of Toronto's population. The CAC brought Toronto's diverse communities together for discussion and ideation with City staff, enabling engagement with representatives from across Toronto's population, including equity-deserving and historically marginalized communities.

Key engagement activities conducted for the Road Map project included:

- Four CAC meetings, five public pop-ups at community spaces and two public surveys that engaged approximately 2,500 residents;
- One focus group discussion and seven one-on-one meetings with Indigenous businesses and organizations;
- Ten industry workshops with over 200 participants from small and large businesses, and one industry survey that received over 80 responses;
- Two workshops with City Division Heads, four workshops with City staff and over 60 additional discussions with staff subject matter experts;
- One workshop with members of the Canadian Circular Cities and Regions Initiative and 12 meetings with staff and representatives from Canadian and international cities and organizations.

It is important to note that this project did not duplicate work already being undertaken through the Long-term Waste Management Strategy (Waste Strategy) or other waste management planning initiatives led by Solid Waste Management Services. The 2016 Waste Strategy is currently being updated and is scheduled for completion in early 2026. While the Waste Strategy is focused on managing the waste of City customers and maximizing diversion of City-managed waste streams to keep waste out of landfill, the Road Map addresses city-wide waste generation. However, both strategies have a common goal of minimizing the amount of garbage being sent to landfill and share several guiding principles, including waste elimination/avoidance, reuse and resource recovery, community-level activation, and climate action. As both the Waste Strategy and Road Map move to implementation 2026 onwards, Environment, Climate and Forestry and Solid Waste Management Services will continue to collaborate to maximize impact for residents and find efficiencies in achieving City-wide policy goals.

Key findings from interested parties

The Road Map project was informed by extensive engagement with interested parties to ensure that it reflects Toronto's unique context and priorities. Input was sought from residents, Indigenous organizations, industry representatives, and peer cities to ground the Road Map in a broad range of perspectives. This feedback was sought throughout the Road Map project to validate findings, identify key issues and potential solutions and develop a truly made-in-Toronto approach to circularity. Detailed summaries of this engagement can be found in the summary reports for each project Phase, published on the City's website.

Residents

Key findings from engagement with residents through surveys, pop-ups and Community Advisory Committee meetings include:

- **Support for the circular transition:** A majority of residents engaged throughout this Road Map project expressed strong support for the City's efforts to move towards a circular economy.¹ Participants also articulated their support for the prioritization of the food, construction and waste diversion and materials recovery sectors as a starting point for the Road Map.
- **Awareness and communications:** While many residents understand some aspects of the circular economy, participants expressed the need for the City to invest in communications and awareness-building measures to drive broader cultural behaviour change. City efforts should be designed to foster understanding, buy-in and participation. Participants stressed that any communication campaign should use relatable and accessible language, be offered in multiple languages and clearly communicate the benefits of circularity in ways that resonate with members of Toronto's diverse community.
- **Participation opportunities:** While many residents already participate in circular economy activities (such as purchasing from second-hand marketplaces, making item donations, etc.), participants expressed a strong desire to see the City support and offer more opportunities to participate in the circular economy. For instance, participants expressed the desire for more visible, community-embedded solutions, such as repair cafés, second-hand shops, food-sharing hubs and resource exchanges. Participants endorsed the idea of the City supporting and encouraging Toronto businesses to adopt circular practices that enable more sustainable consumption.
- **Equity and inclusion:** Participants emphasized the need to build a circular economy that reflects Toronto's diverse communities and cultures. They stressed

¹ From July-August 2025, City of Toronto conducted a public survey for residents as part of this project. In response to the question "How important do you think it is for Toronto to prioritize moving toward a circular economy?", out of the 1,192 responses, 78% said "very important", 16% said "moderately important", 3% said "slightly important", 2% said "not important" and 1% said "not sure". Similar sentiments were expressed by residents during various other public engagement efforts throughout this project, including pop-ups and Community Advisory Committee meetings.

the need for the City to remove barriers to full participation and center equity, inclusion and accessibility when designing new policies, programs and services.

- **Lead by example:** Participants called for bold action by the City in its own operations. As part of its leadership, the City should communicate progress and the impact of its circular initiatives to build public support and momentum.
- **Collaboration and relationship building:** Participants recognized that the City cannot build a circular economy alone and expressed a desire for the City to build strong relationships with other orders of government, civil society, industry, residents, community organizations, academia and Indigenous Peoples to enable change.

Indigenous organizations and businesses

During the project, City staff invited interested Indigenous people to share their perspectives and help the City ensure that Indigenous worldviews are embedded within the Road Map. Although the City received valuable and detailed feedback from those Indigenous individuals who participated in one-on-one meetings and a focus group discussion, the City acknowledges that it was unable to achieve a level of engagement sufficient to reflect the full diversity and depth of Indigenous perspectives.

Building long-term, meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities requires time, trust, and ongoing dialogue. Such relationship-building does not always match the timelines and structures of City-led projects. Indigenous people and communities set their own priorities and often have limited capacity to engage. Moving forward, City staff will strive to work with interested Indigenous communities to collaborate on circularity in ways that are grounded in trust, respect, and reciprocity. This work will be pursued with care and sustained over the coming years as an integral part of implementing the Road Map.

- **Indigenous values and sustainability:** Participants shared that Indigenous communities have long practiced sustainability, emphasizing intergenerational responsibility and ecological stewardship. These values resonate with the goals of a circular economy, which include reducing waste generation, respecting and preserving natural resources, and considering the impact on future generations. Participants emphasized that Indigenous ways of knowing, place-based ecological knowledge, and existing community-led practices can guide and strengthen Toronto's circular economy initiatives.
- **Collaboration and trust building:** Building trust and exercising patience were identified as essential for the City to meaningfully partner with Indigenous communities. Participants stressed that collaboration must be transparent and respectful of Indigenous governance systems, knowledge, and capacity. They noted the importance of prioritizing relationships with established Indigenous organizations, ensuring these relationships are backed with resources, and engaging Indigenous subject matter experts early to build mutual respect and shared goals.

- **Indigenous leadership:** Participants emphasized that Indigenous leadership must be centred in the City's circular economy work. This includes ensuring that City programs and policies respect Indigenous governance and knowledge systems, while also creating space for Indigenous communities to co-create and participate in decision-making. Participants further noted that the City should support Indigenous-led projects, businesses, and community-driven models that are already advancing circular practices.
- **Challenges and opportunities:** Indigenous businesses face unique barriers, such as limited access to resources, capital, and training. Participants called for targeted measures such as simplified funding processes, mentorship and training initiatives, and dedicated support for small and emerging businesses. They noted that removing systemic barriers would enable greater Indigenous participation in Toronto's circular transition.
- **Language and framing:** Participants conveyed that the term "circular economy" does not resonate with Indigenous communities. They stressed the importance of using culturally relevant and accessible language, visuals, storytelling, and communication approaches tailored to diverse audiences, including youth and Elders.

Industry

The City sought perspectives from representatives of three priority sectors – construction, food systems, and waste diversion and materials recovery – as well as environmental organizations. Key findings from workshops, one-on-one meetings and an industry survey include:

- **Support and strategic direction:** Many Toronto businesses are already developing and adopting circular practices. Participants recognized that circular business models and solutions have the potential for significant economic contributions. However, certain enabling conditions for circularity are currently lacking, including technology, supportive policies, incentives, reliable data and public awareness. As such, participants expressed a desire for government leadership by setting the ambition and direction through a strategy for the circular economy transition.
- **Cost and economics:** Participants conveyed that, for the industrial, commercial and institutional sector, waste disposal is often preferred over diversion or more innovative circular approaches because it is perceived as less costly, particularly in the absence of full lifecycle cost accounting methods. Also, the development of new waste management infrastructure to handle additional waste streams is considered very expensive.
- **Policy, regulation and standards:** Participants commented that current policies across all levels of government are more focused on waste diversion than waste prevention. Further, participants noted that jurisdictions have different approaches to waste management and circularity, creating a challenging environment for businesses that operate across municipal borders. Participants felt the landscape of standards for circularity is also underdeveloped in Canada, and where they exist, are

voluntary. They also noted that where regulations built on circular principles exist, they often lack robust enforcement, resulting in low adoption and compliance rates.

- **Coordination and collaboration:** Participants noted that the shift to a circular economy is complex and requires alignment among many actors. Businesses and organizations often lack a central coordinating body to connect surplus resources with potential users. At the same time, the City has limited influence over provincial and federal policies and regulations that strongly shape waste management and circularity.
- **Secondary markets:** Participants identified many barriers to establishing reliable secondary markets, including challenges securing consistent demand and supply of secondary materials, establishing distribution channels and finding practical and low-cost storage and space solutions. These barriers limit the growth of large-scale reuse, resale, and material recovery systems in Toronto.
- **Education and awareness:** While some businesses are leaders in adopting circular practices, there is a broader lack of awareness about the true cost of waste and the benefits of circularity. Engagement revealed that many organizations are unsure how to apply circular approaches in a practical and financially sustainable manner, and the shortage of local examples operating at scale makes it difficult to build a clear business case. This is further challenged by a lack of available data and tailored guidance on how to incorporate circular principles into business operations.

Peer Cities

The City sought perspectives from representatives of 12 jurisdictions in Canada, the United States, and Europe to understand their approaches to and recent experiences with implementing circular economy strategies. Key findings from one-on-one meetings with staff from these jurisdictions, as well as a budget analysis of eight comparable cities across North America and Europe, are presented below.

- **Public awareness and engagement:** Interviewees observed that residents often have a limited understanding of circular economy terminology, practices and benefits. While residents recognize the challenges of rising waste volumes and constrained landfill capacity, they are less familiar with how circular solutions operate or how to participate. Interviewees reported using early demonstration projects at the neighbourhood level to communicate tangible benefits and build momentum.
- **Governance and implementation:** Similar to other complex strategies, interviewees noted that successful implementation requires sustained program funding, cross-divisional coordination and usually more time and resources than initially anticipated. They also noted that circular economy expertise is frequently centralized within a small core team, while long-term success depends on securing staff capacity or “champions” within other municipal divisions.
- **Measurement and reporting:** Interviewees consistently identified challenges in measuring circular economy outcomes, particularly beyond program-level indicators.

While many have baseline assessments of material flows, they struggle to capture system-wide impacts such as private investment, employment or overall waste reduction.

- **Varied jurisdictional approaches:** It was noted that peer cities are tailoring implementation to their local contexts. Interviewees from Canada reported taking a collaborative approach to designing and implementing circular programs. They are actively embedding circular principles across divisions, with larger cities allocating dedicated budgets and smaller ones leveraging existing funds. Interviewees from the United States reported framing circularity as an economic development tool, managed by small, centralized teams and supported by voluntary programs due to limited regulatory authority. European interviewees reported the strongest political and legislative support, embedding staff across multiple departments and linking circularity to broader priorities such as climate action, poverty reduction and economic resiliency.
- **Budget Analysis:**² The budget analysis of eight comparable cities across North America and Europe revealed that cities are dedicating substantial budgets to their circular economy transition. Amsterdam, Netherlands stands out with one of the highest spends at over CAD \$11 million per year,³ while London, England allocates about CAD \$7 million annually.⁴ Other Canadian and European cities, including Montreal, Metro Vancouver, and Paris, France, are also committing multi-million-dollar budgets in the CAD \$2–9 million range.⁵

² Figures are a conversion of the reported budget into Canadian dollars per year for comparison across currencies.

³ Budget for Amsterdam's Circular Economy Program. Source: Municipality of Amsterdam Budget 2025: <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/begroting/begroting-2025/>.

⁴ Budget for ReLondon as of 2025. This budget covers only ReLondon's activities (projects, programs, and staffing) and does not include initiatives led exclusively by the Greater London Authority, such as circular integration into City-owned development and legislative initiatives. Source: ReLondon Approved Business Plan (April 2025): <https://relondon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Approved-Business-Plan-April-2025.pdf>

⁵ Budget for Montreal Circular Economy 3-Year Action Plan (2025 – 2027) is \$7 million. Budget covers economic development and does not include public education campaigns. Funding for resident engagement is provided in a separate budget. Source: Montreal Circular Economy Action Plan: <https://mtl.ged.montreal.ca/constellio/?collection=mtlca&portal=REPDOCVDM#!displayDocument/00000108735>; Budget for Metro Vancouver's Zero Waste Implementation 2025 is \$2.9 million. Source: Greater Vancouver Solid Waste Services 2025 – 2029 Financial Plan: <https://metrovancover.org/about-us/Documents/financial-plan-2025-2029.pdf>; The 2025 City of Paris Budget reports €1.9 million for waste prevention public awareness campaigns (€1.5million) and the phase out of single-use plastics (€0.4million). Source: City of Paris Budget 2025: https://cdn.paris.fr/paris/2024/12/20/bp-2025-rapport-projet-budget_2-2J4H.pdf.