



 Charlottesville, VA

**IMPROVED TOILET REBATE
PROGRAM GENERATES UTILITY
SAVINGS AND SUPPORTS
SUSTAINABLE WATER USE**



A stack of US dollar bills is shown falling into a stream of water, creating a splash. The bills are slightly blurred, suggesting motion. The water is clear and bright, with some bubbles visible.

OUR APPROACH

WaterNow partnered with the City of Charlottesville to review and revamp its 20-year-old toilet rebate program, which helps participants save money on their water bills while reducing the City's energy use and water demand. As part of this review, the team analyzed past participation in the program to identify participation gaps and assess the potential to reach additional demographic groups. They also researched similar programs for insights, evaluated options for updating the program, and collaborated with local organizations to encourage more participation from low-income and disadvantaged community members. Finally, the team created an implementation plan for these program updates.

IMPACT

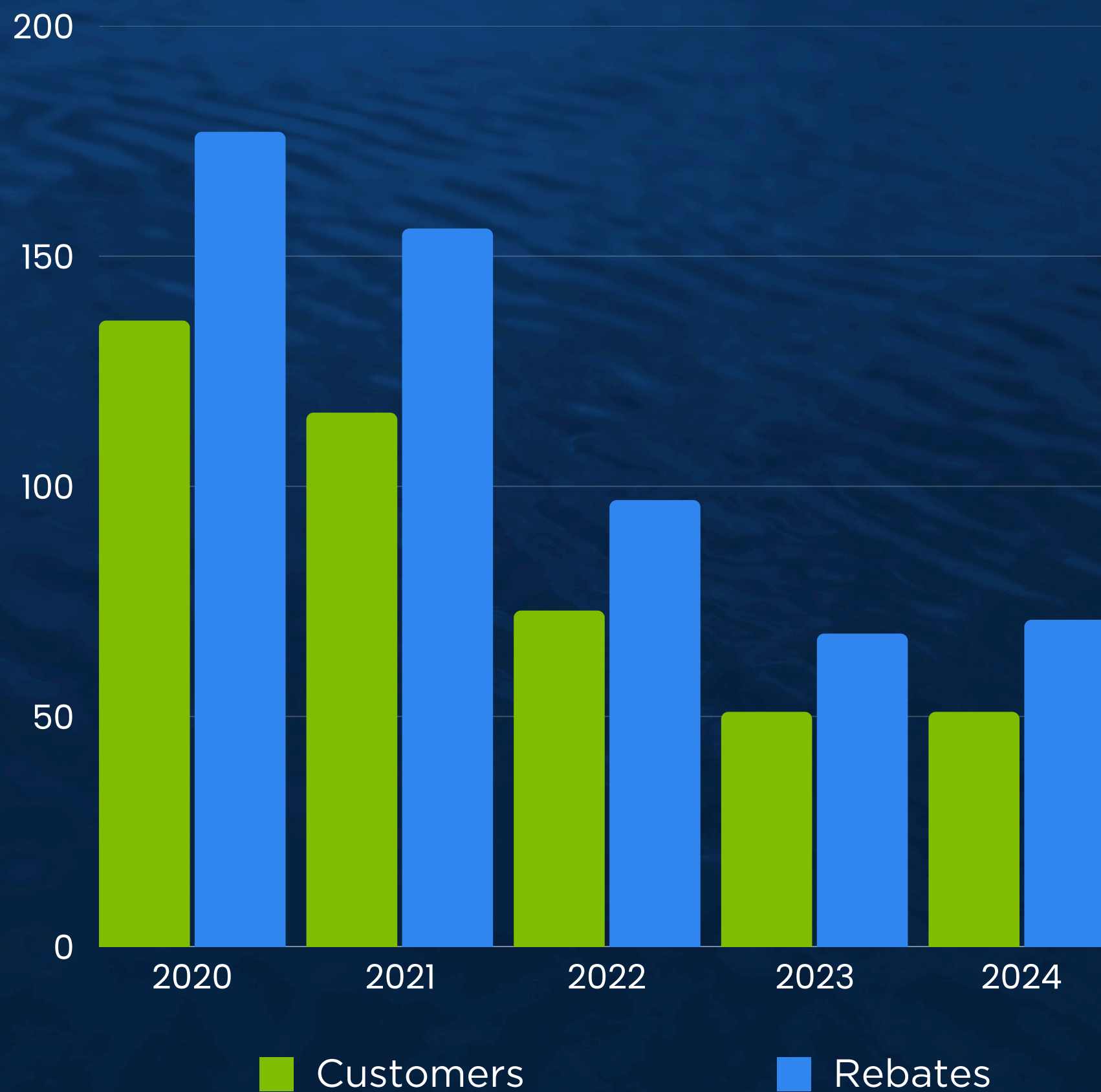
WaterNow developed an implementation plan for updating the City's Toilet Rebate Program, drawing on our research of past participation trends, similar rebate programs in other communities, and processes influencing resident participation, such as customer and toilet eligibility and application procedures. In October 2024, the City expanded the program, increasing the rebate amount from \$100 to \$150 and expanding toilet eligibility to replace toilets using 1.6 gallons per flush (gpf) instead of the previous 3 gpf.

IMPACT (CONTINUED)

Since these updates, the City has observed a 34% increase in rebate applications compared to the previous reporting year and has replaced 101 toilets, marking a 42% increase from the prior reporting year. The City is currently working to launch a pilot direct toilet installation program that will provide free toilet replacements to income-qualified customers.

KEY DRIVERS

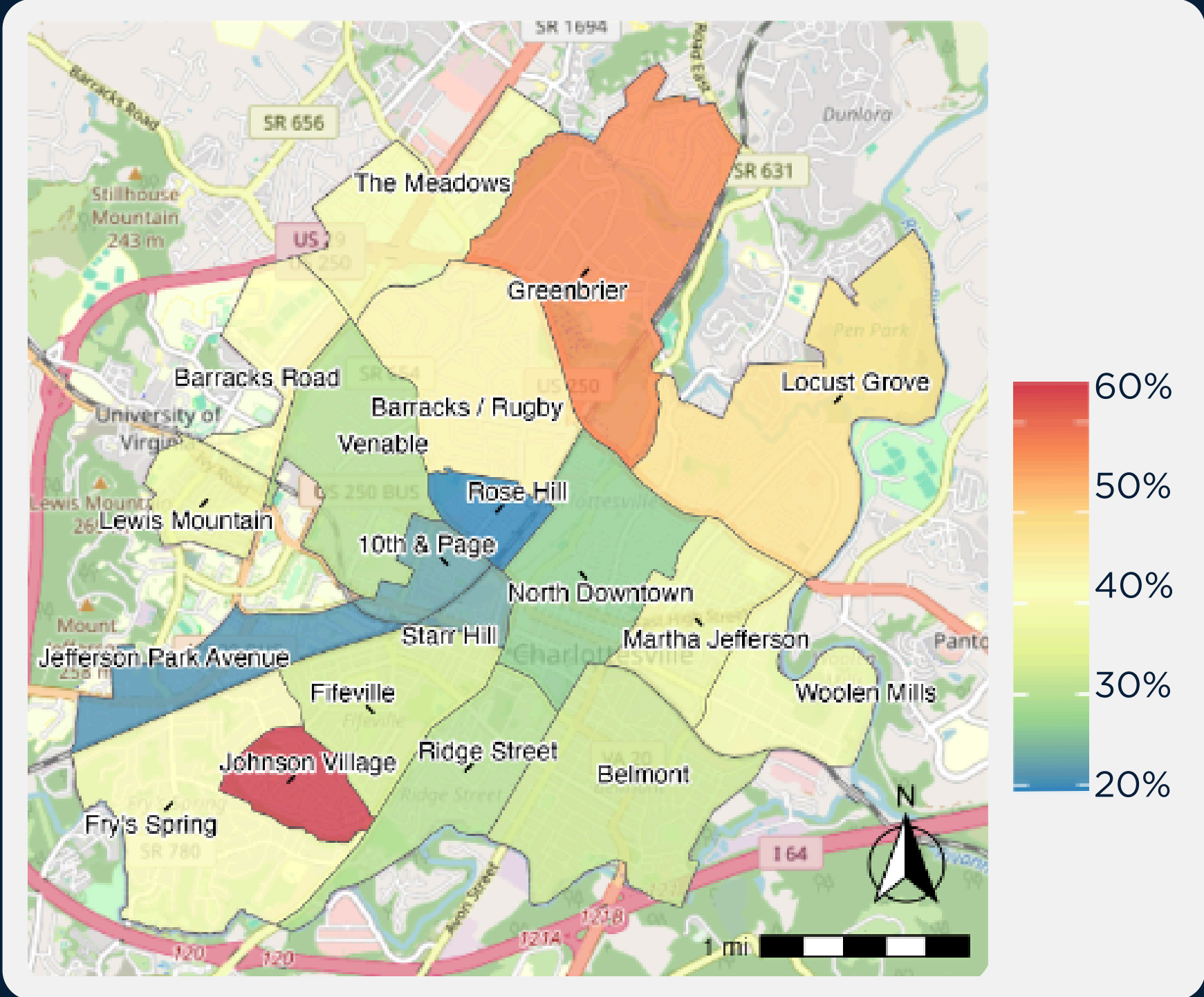
The City's Toilet Rebate Program is its longest-running water conservation initiative. Since 2002, it has issued over 7,400 toilet rebates to residents, allowing them to replace old, inefficient toilets with water-efficient, WaterSense models. This effort has saved Charlottesville more than 787 million gallons of water since the program's inception. However, the City had observed a decline in rebate requests in recent years and sought to update the program to ensure it continues to appeal to and meet the community's needs.



HOW IT WORKS

Research and Recommendations

Updating the program involved a multi-phased approach. WaterNow first analyzed the existing program, examining the City’s communication and community engagement practices and analyzing implementation data to identify trends and gaps in participation across neighborhoods and demographic characteristics.



Rebate Participation by Neighborhood

HOW IT WORKS

Research and Recommendations (continued)

The team then researched peer communities to find best practices in toilet rebate programs, focusing on direct install programs, eligibility criteria, and outreach strategies. They interviewed the Local Energy Alliance Program and Albemarle Housing Improvement Program for insights on community engagement. Finally, the team compared options for updating the program, such as expanding customer and toilet eligibility and streamlining administrative processes, and created a roadmap for implementing the selected improvements.



HOW IT WORKS

Toilet Rebate Program

To receive a rebate, Charlottesville water utility customers submit a completed, signed application along with the itemized toilet purchase receipt to the City. Customers can also include a receipt for toilet installation if they are requesting the rebate to cover these costs. Upon approval, participants receive the rebate as a credit to the listed utility account, or as a check to the name listed under the utility account or homeowner.



**THIS IS A HUGE WAY TO SAVE WATER BY JUST DOING ONE QUICK
FIX. . . . WE WANT TO MAKE [THE REBATE PROGRAM] MORE
ECONOMICAL AND USEFUL FOR EVERYONE SO THAT THEY CAN
REPLACE THOSE TOILETS AND IT'S A LOT EASIER FOR THEM.**

- Jill Greiner, Charlottesville Water Efficiency
Program Coordinator

THE PATH FORWARD

With the help of WaterNow's research and analysis of the City's program, similar programs in peer communities, and interviews with local organizations with decades of community engagement experience, the City revamped the program to be more relevant and accessible to the community in just a few months. The new program will help Charlottesville maintain a sustainable water supply for its residents and build resilience to water security threats, such as the drought that occurred in the summer of 2024.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- (1) Collaboration—between departments or with other organizations—can streamline program implementation. For example, coordinating on outreach or aligning eligibility requirements and application processes with other home improvement programs makes participation easier for both the customer and the utility.
- (2) Proactively consider how to address liability issues, the workflow process, and be sure to develop contingency plans and budgets that encompass unexpected repair needs.
- (3) Consider the cost and availability of local toilet models – especially amid economic challenges like supply chain disruptions and inflation – as well as the unique needs of older infrastructure that may require higher volume toilets.

KEY TAKEAWAYS (CONTINUED)

- (4) Supporting low-income customers is one of the most impactful areas to focus on because customers' cost and water savings can be significant and these replacements might not occur otherwise.
- (5) To support renters, consider focusing on affordable housing providers who may be most likely to pass savings onto tenants.
- (6) Empower renters with communication toolkits to inform their landlords about program benefits.
- (7) To reach low-income customers, leverage Census and participation data to identify neighborhoods with low engagement, build partnerships with community groups and leaders in those areas, and promote programs through local resources.

SOURCES

City of Charlottesville, *City of Charlottesville Wins 2024 WaterSense® Sustained Excellence Award* (Sept. 26, 2024), <https://www.charlottesville.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=1942>.

City of Charlottesville, *Drought*, <https://charlottesville.org/937/Drought>.

City of Charlottesville, *Now Accepting Requests for \$150 Toilet Rebates with Expanded Eligibility* (Oct. 25, 2024), <https://www.charlottesville.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=1976>.

City of Charlottesville, *WaterSense Labeled Toilet Rebates*, <https://www.charlottesville.gov/506/Toilet-Rebates>.

City of Charlottesville, *Toilet Rebates*, <https://www.charlottesville.gov/644/Toilet-Rebates>.

City of Charlottesville, *Utility Rate Report FY 2026 (2025)*, <https://www.charlottesville.gov/documentcenter/view/14151>.

Gabby Womack, *Toilet Rebate Expanded in Charlottesville*, 29 News (Oct 28, 2024, 2:02PM MT), <https://www.29news.com/2024/10/28/toilet-rebate-expanded-charlottesville/>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[INFORMATION ON EPA'S WATERSENSE LABEL](#)

[SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS OF CHARLOTTESVILLE'S PROGRAM](#)

[BEST PRACTICES IN TOILET REBATE AND DIRECT INSTALLATION PROGRAMS](#)

[GUIDANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMPLEMENTING DIRECT TOILET INSTALLATION AND TIERED TOILET REBATE PROGRAMS](#)

RELATED PROJECTS



EVANS, CO

Free in-home audit program and water efficient indoor plumbing installations



THORNTON, CO

Incentivizing water efficient home construction



CHEYENNE, WY

Income-qualified direct install program development and support

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