



Financial Services Audit Committee Communication

Date: November 18, 2022

To: Great Lakes Water Authority Audit Committee

From: Madison Merzlyakov, Affordability & Assistance Manager

Re: Affordability & Assistance Update

Background: In 2021, an Affordability & Assistance Team was created within GLWA's Financial Services Area. The team serves as the internal and external resource for strategic policies and programs related to water affordability and assistance.

Analysis: This month we present an update on multiple initiatives the Affordability & Assistance Team have been focused on, including expanding partnerships for the Water Residential Assistance Program (WRAP), the rollout of recently approved WRAP improvements, and an update on a refreshed WRAP Quarterly Report.

Expanding WRAP Partnerships

The Affordability & Assistance Team is excited to share the progress made to bring United Way of Southeast Michigan (UWSEM) on board as the program administrator for WRAP in Oakland County. This is just one of the efforts GLWA is making to increase participation and fund utilization of the program. In June 2022, Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency (Wayne Metro) stepped in as the temporary WRAP administrator for Oakland County communities, while work to engage with UWSEM began.

Since that time, GLWA, UWSEM and Wayne Metro have met regularly to make this a successful transition. Meetings during the summer months served as training sessions to allow Wayne Metro to demonstrate how the program works, how to manage participants, and how to best engage with municipalities. Today, the organizations have established working groups to complete the individual tasks laid out in the project plan. Concurrently, GLWA and UWSEM finalized the scope of work for the program administrator contract for UWSEM to assume administrative responsibility for Oakland County in December 2022 and are currently engaging in the procurement process. The Audit Committee will continue to receive updates regarding this effort.

WRAP Improvements

Last month the WRAP improvements that were approved by the GLWA Board of Directors in June 2022 took effect. These changes included:

- Providing WRAP as a core service, thereby removing the need for communities to opt-in or out
- Determining bill credits that are based on household income, referred to as the WRAP Income Based Plan (IBP)
- Emphasizing case management and direct client assistance

GLWA has coordinated with Wayne Metro and Macomb Community Action (MCA) to work through the details of these changes and establish a rollout plan. Qualified households applying for WRAP this month will be enrolled in WRAP IBP. Households that are already in WRAP will also be able to take advantage of WRAP IBP.

A Virtual WRAP Update Meeting for GLWA Member Partners was held October 27, 2022, with the purpose of explaining these program improvements and how they impact our member partners and their residents. Over 100 participants engaged in the meeting. Next steps include connecting with individual Member Partners, to walk through what the program changes mean for their specific community.

WRAP Quarterly Report

The Affordability & Assistance Team, alongside Public Sector Consultants have been evaluating the Quarterly WRAP Report that is shared with the Audit Committee. Team members have updated metrics and developed new formatting to better tell the story of WRAP and evaluate the program's success. These changes will enable the report to be more widely shared with Member Partners and the public. The Audit Committee can expect to review the FY 2023 First Quarterly Report in the new format at the December Audit Committee Meeting.

Other Updates

- GLWA has engaged Plante Moran to work with BS&A to understand the challenges Member Partners may face when administering WRAP in their communities and explore potential solutions. We are grateful to the communities that volunteered their time to walk us through their current processes and will provide additional updates as they become available.
- The Member Partner WRAP Advisory Panel has played a key role in providing insight on how to better engage Member Partners in outreach efforts for WRAP. Multiple opportunities for the Affordability & Assistance team to share at community board

and council meetings have resulted from the panel discussions. Updates on these opportunities will be included in future quarterly reports.

Proposed Action: Receive and file this report.