



Financial Services Audit Committee Communication

Date: February 26, 2021

To: Great Lakes Water Authority Audit Committee

From: Jon Wheatley, Public Finance Manager

Re: Presentation: Water Residential Assistance Program Redesign Implementation Update

Background: The Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) engaged Public Sector Consultants (PSC) to serve as the WRAP Advisor to evaluate the current Water Residential Assistance Program (WRAP). PSC presented their report and recommendations at the October 23, 2020 Audit Committee meeting and to the GLWA Board on October 28, 2020.

GLWA has extended its engagement with PSC to help support the implementation of the recommended program changes through June 2021. As part of the engagement, the seventeen recommendations from the final report were prioritized into three phases of implementation by PSC and GLWA. Based on preliminary discussions, it is anticipated that the full implementation of all recommendations may take at least twelve months, depending on the feedback from the community action agencies (CAA).

Analysis: The included presentation prepared by PSC provides the implementation status update for each of the recommended program changes. The presentation includes target launch dates for CAA initiatives to improve program adoption and uptake as well as increase conservation participation. The presentation also includes an update on the implementation timeline for the direct service pilot program.

Next Steps: GLWA and PSC will continue to meet regularly with Wayne Metro, Macomb County Community Action Agency (MCAA), and Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency (OLHSA) to discuss their individual progress regarding their specific implementation plans. Per the outlined next steps in the presentation, PSC will bring recommended program changes, program metrics and program reporting format to the March 26, 2021 Audit Committee for review.

Budget Impact: None.

Proposed Action: Receive and file this presentation.

Water Residential Assistance Program: Implementation Progress Report

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Great Lakes Water Authority Audit Committee

Friday, February 26, 2021

Key Takeaways

- Substantive changes to the Water Residential Assistance Program (WRAP) delivery are in progress.
- Wayne Metro, OLHSA, and MCA are partnering to transition program intake, conservation, and communication and outreach.
- Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) is in the process of adding staff support for WRAP.
- Public Sector Consultants (PSC) and GLWA are developing several proposed WRAP changes for the Audit Committee to review at their March meeting.

June 2020

Nov 2020

Jan 2021

April 2021

July 2021

WRAP Evaluation (June–November 2020)

Implementation Support (November 2020–July 2021)

**Phase 1
(November–December)**

Expand Program Update
and Adoption

Improve Program
Awareness

Enhance GLWA Oversight

Phase 2 (January–March)

Improve Data Collection and Reporting

Develop Outcome Measures for Reporting

Identify Performance Benchmarks

Quantify Eligible Populations

Simplify Eligibility Determination

Foster Understanding of Property Tax
Loop-hole

Expand Funding for Customers with High
Arrearages

Establish Direct Services Option

Prioritize Direct Conservation and Repair

Phase 3 (April–June)

Reach Customers with the Greatest Need

Address Immediate Crisis

Leverage Other Forms of Assistance

Increase Program Funding

Project Overview and Timeline

Implementation Status Update: Phase 1

- Expand Program Adoption and Uptake

- Status

- GLWA and PSC met with community action agencies (CAAs) to discuss outreach to member partner communities and efforts to transition program intake from Wayne Metro to OLHSA and MCA.
 - OLHSA is in the process of transitioning program intake (targeted launch date of March 1).
 - MCA is in the early stages of transitioning program intake (targeted launch date of April 1).

- Next Steps

- GLWA and CAAs will meet with nonparticipating communities to encourage participation in WRAP by March.
 - GLWA and PSC will identify remaining barriers and potential solutions to ensure universal access to WRAP throughout GLWA's service territory.
 - GLWA will monitor ongoing transition planning for program intake.

Implementation Status Update: Phase 1

- **Improve Program Awareness—Communications and Marketing**
 - Status
 - Wayne Metro is working with OLHSA and MCA to transition marketing and communications functions.
 - OLHSA and MCA are beginning to perform these functions for their respective service areas.
 - Next Step
 - CAAs are being asked to submit draft marketing plans to GLWA by March 1, 2021.
- **Enhance GLWA Program Oversight**
 - Status
 - GLWA is developing a job description for a WRAP Program Administrator to provide dedicated support and oversight.
 - Worked with CAAs to better define needs for GLWA administration and oversight.
 - Next Step
 - GLWA will post for this position in March 2021.

Implementation Status Update: Phase 2

- Simplify Eligibility Determination—Categorical Eligibility
 - Status
 - Categorical eligibility enables customers who are already receiving one form of assistance to be automatically qualified to receive other forms of assistance with similar eligibility requirements.
 - PSC has researched criteria for other income-qualified programs to identify similarities with WRAP eligibility.
 - CAAs support the use of categorical eligibility for WRAP.
 - Next Steps
 - PSC is developing a memo summarizing a potential change to WRAP eligibility to allow for categorical eligibility determination.
 - GLWA's Board of Directors will need to approve proposed changes to program eligibility. A summary of proposed changes will be presented at the **March Audit Committee Meeting** for review.

Implementation Status Update: Phase 2

- Data Collection, Outcomes Measures, and Reporting
 - Status
 - Data gaps have been identified based on WRAP performance measures defined in the program design report.
 - PSC has developed a revised reporting template that integrates and streamlines desired information.
 - Potential outcomes measures are also being developed to be included in the revised reporting template.
 - Next Steps
 - PSC to review revised reporting template with CAAs and begin collecting additional data.
 - PSC will share outcome measures with GLWA and CAAs and incorporate into revised reporting template.
 - GLWA will present revised WRAP progress report at the **March Audit Committee Meeting**.

Implementation Status Update: Phase 2

- Identify Performance Metrics

- Status

- PSC has compiled WRAP data and conducted analysis to identify past performance trends.
 - PSC has developed a list of variables that could be utilized in setting performance metrics.

- Next Step

- Potential performance metrics will be presented for review at the **March Audit Committee meeting**. Board review and approval to follow.

- Quantify Eligible Populations

- Status

- PSC is compiling relevant data from the Census Bureau and CAAs' Community Needs Assessments to identify the potential eligible population for WRAP.

- Next Step

- PSC will provide GLWA with estimates for eligible WRAP populations within member partner communities and the region.

Implementation Status Update: Phase 2

- **Prioritize Direct Conservation Investment and Repairs**
 - Status
 - Wayne Metro is working with OLHSA and MCA to transition WRAP's conservation services delivery.
 - CAAs have identified potential changes to the eligibility determination for WRAP.
 - Next Step
 - GLWA to review proposed conservation plans for individual CAAs (targeted launch date of April 1).
- **Serving Customers with High Arrearages**
 - Status
 - CAAs have supported changing the cap on arrearage payments.
 - Next Steps
 - PSC is working through analysis of arrearage data to determine optimal level of arrearage forgiveness and related policy options.
 - GLWA's Board of Directors will need to approve any recommended changes to program eligibility. Will be presented at **March Audit Committee Meeting**.

Implementation Status Update: Phase 2

- Establish Direct Services Option

- Status

- PSC is inventorying online payment capabilities used by member partner communities for water and sewer billing to facilitate a direct services option.
 - Options for direct service will be informed by feedback from CAAs and member partner communities.

- Next Steps

- PSC and GLWA will develop a pilot proposal for review at the **March Audit Committee meeting**.
 - The goal is to develop a pilot approach to be tested this program year (April–June).

- Understanding the Impact of Shifting Past Due Water Bills to Property Tax Rolls

- Status and Next Step

- PSC will draft a memo summarizing the potential impacts on housing stability, health, and safety that arise from this practice and the role WRAP can play in helping address past-due bills before they become a tax liability.

Implementation Status Update: Phase 3

- The following recommendations still need to be addressed:
- Reach Customers with the Greatest Need
- Address Immediate Customer Crisis
- Leverage Other Forms of Assistance
 - State and federal novel coronavirus (COVID-19) programs
- Increase Program Funding

Questions?



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