

Water Affordability Coalition

Affordability and Planning Grant

July 28, 2022

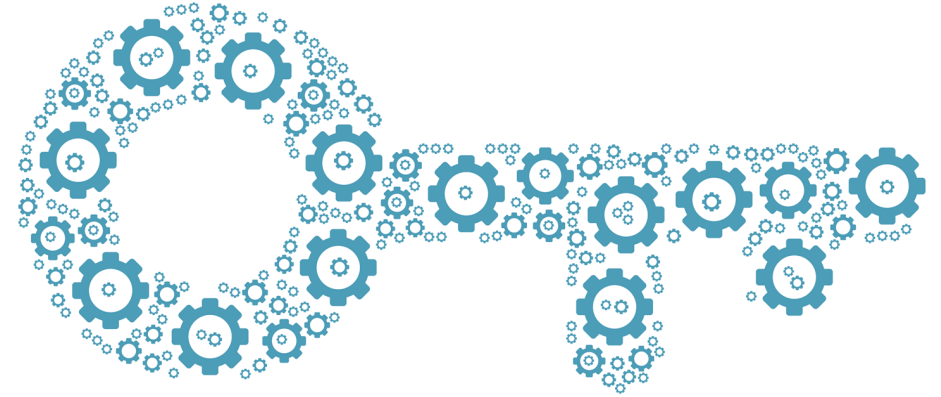


Welcome & Introduction Commissioner Nash



Desired Meeting Outcomes & Agenda

- Touch base with the WRC Affordability Coalition
- Share the key components of the Affordability Report
- Discuss plan for water customer outreach



Key Affordability Plan Components



Short-Term Tiered Assistance Program

A. Framework

- A. GLWA's WRAP is being improved to include an income-based monthly bill assistance program.
- B. Discount tiers are based on the average household water and sewer bill, as a percent of household income.
- C. WRC has developed its own income-based tiered assistance program that would provide a fixed monthly bill with the fixed amount being tiered based upon income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level.
- D. Both frameworks are being considered as concurrent or separate programs.

B. Funding

- A. WRAP is funded by one-half of 1% of GLWA budgeted revenues.
- B. Oakland County receives \$800k annually for households enrolled in WRAP.
- C. WRC is pursuing options to fund its income-based tiered assistance program via WRAP funds and Oakland County ARPA funds.

C. Marketing

- A. WRC is partnering with community action agencies to promote the new WRAP which will help deliver immediate water assistance to customers and demonstrate the need for additional ARPA funds for water assistance.

Long-Term (Permanent) Assistance Program

- Temporary funding sources must be depleted to show the need for a long-term tiered assistance program.
- Once enrollment for eligible households exceeds 10% to 15%, WRAP funding for Oakland County will be exhausted.
- If County ARPA funds are utilized, they must be obligated by Dec. 31, 2024, and spent by Dec. 31, 2026.
- WRC has developed a legislative framework, modeled after the Michigan Energy Assistance Program legislation, to establish a permanent statewide low-income water assistance program with fixed monthly household bills based on Federal Poverty Levels, along with a proposed sustainable funding source for the program via a small fee (less than \$1) on all water bills.



Arrearage Assistance Program

- WRC will promote enrollment in existing arrearage assistance programs.
- GLWA's WRAP provides a 2-year program for arrearage assistance that can be extended for households with senior citizens and individuals with disabilities.
- Federal assistance for arrearages is also available through LIHWAP
 - Until Sept. 2023, when the program expires
- If funding for LIHWAP is not extended, a permanent and long-term arrearage assistance program, through the statewide legislation, will be considered.



Low-income Households Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)

Conservation and Household Plumbing Repair Program

A. Promotion of Existing Program

- A. GLWA's WRAP currently provides the Conservation and Household Plumbing Repair Program.
- B. Historically, there have been challenges with the program, which have directly impacted enrollment.
- C. With recent changes in administration of the program, this impediment should be resolved.
- D. WRC will work with community action agencies implementing WRAP in Oakland County to promote this program.

B. Development of Partnerships

- A. WRC is exploring partnerships with gas and electric utilities to include water repairs in home energy audits, in addition to partnerships with Oakland County's Building and Home Improvement Program.

C. Leak Identification Technology

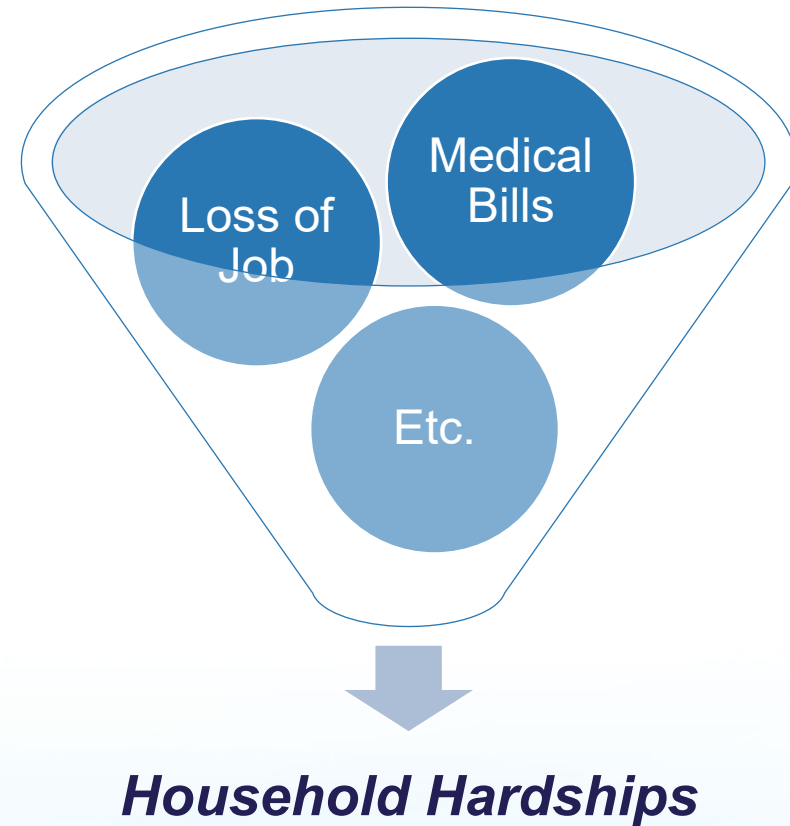
- A. WRC will utilize a meter reporting tool to identify potential household leaks and target outreach for households with arrearages.

D. Internal billing policy

- A. WRC has developed an internal billing policy related to adjustments for water leaks.

Short-Term Hardship Assistance

- We are developing a new assistance program to address short-term needs due to household hardships.
 - Loss of job
 - Medical bills
 - Other life crisis events
- Funding will be provided through new private donation programs.
 - Bill roundup program
- Exploring partnership with United Way to administer the program.



Extended and Affordable Payment Plans

- Payment arrangements v. Payment Plans
- A new program for extended, flexible, and affordable payment plans will be implemented by early 2023, along with the return of a water shut-off process.
- Consideration of utilizing a third-party provider to market and manage the payment plans could improve our level of service and customer convenience and ensure payment plans are tailored and affordable for each customer.



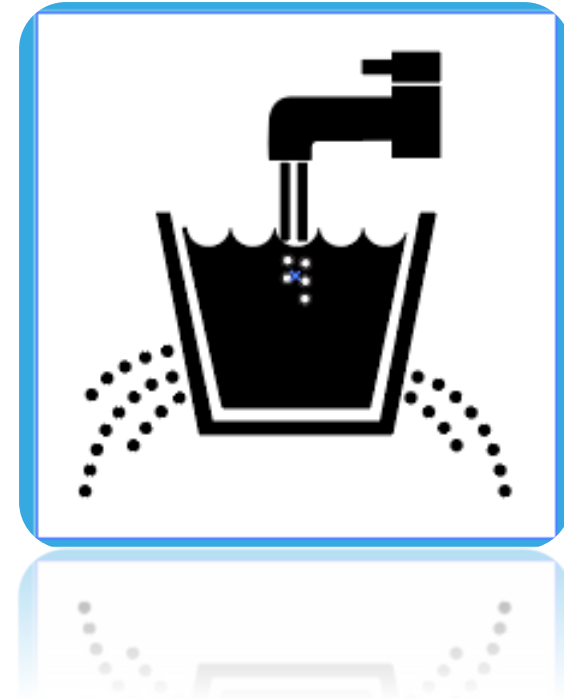
Waiver for Late Payment Penalties and Fees

- Our current policy for late payment penalties and fees is one waiver every 12 months.
- This policy will be continued, and further adjustments made, if necessary, in accordance with the development of WRC's People First Policies and Procedures.



Service Shut-off Deferral

- The shut-off moratorium in effect for 2020 through 2022 will be lifted in 2023.
- The shut-off policy is in the process of being revised to encourage customer payment through clear, effective, and compassionate communication strategies.
- Water service shut-offs remain an option for non-payment but it will be utilized as a last resort, opposed to a primary driver, with many intervention points and paths to provide customers with alternatives to loss of water service.



People First Policies and Procedures

- We created a Water Equity statement, and all billing related policies and procedures are being internally evaluated and subjected to a review to determine if policy changes should be made to align with the Water Equity statement.
- We are also creating a process to develop, revise and review billing policies focused on advancing principles of water equity.

The WRC acknowledges that many water systems are deeply entangled with social, economic, and environmental injustices that have accumulated over decades of purposeful decisions that have deprioritized or willfully ignored the needs of certain communities, particularly communities of color. We are committed to fully understanding these injustices and learning how they create barriers to water equity in the communities we serve. With that knowledge, we are dedicated to continually striving for water equity by developing policy decisions around the people who experience the consequences of our policies and creating programs - in partnership with communities – designed to meet their needs.

Communications and Public Outreach Plan

A strategic communications and outreach plan will be developed through collaboration with community partners and stakeholders, to:

Identify and implement best practices to improve customer communications

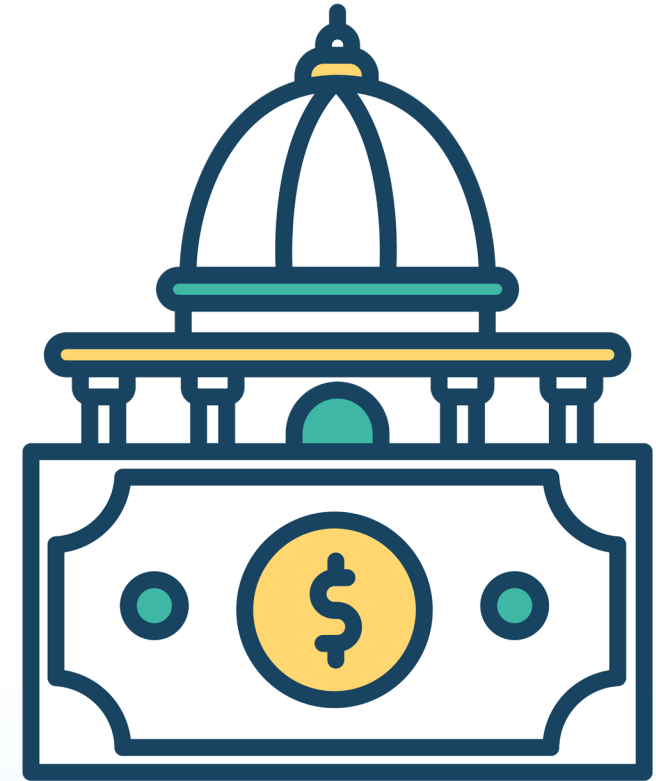
Build community trust

Increase enrollment in customer assistance programs

Increase participation in our Workforce Development Program

Capital Replacement and Maintenance Programs

- Existing capital replacement and maintenance programs will continue to be evaluated on an ongoing basis, focusing on maintaining or improving the:
 - Current level of service
 - Using asset management tools
 - Leveraging external funding sources
- New federal and state project funding opportunities will be considered.



Water Customer Outreach



Letter to Customers and Marketing Flyer

- We are hosting a Town Hall in each community to receive input on our water affordability plan and to introduce our ideas in collaboration with the coalition
- We also have a flyer that shows information about LIHWAP and WRAP for help with water assistance immediately
- We need your help to spread the word and to help us get customers to attend the town hall to discuss the proposed plan
- Please post the letter and flyer at your organizations to help notify water customers

Pontiac Town Hall

Date: Thursday, August 11

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Pontiac City Hall, 47450
Woodward Ave, Pontiac, MI 48342

Royal Oak Township Town Hall

Date: TBD

Time: TBD

Location: TBD



Next Meeting

August at 25 a.m. via Zoom



Thank You!

 **Questions:** affordability@oakgov.com

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