



Item Number: 3

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS AGENDA ACTION REQUEST

DATE: March 25, 2025

TO: Mark Washington, City Manager

COMMITTEE: Fiscal Committee

LIAISON: Scott Saindon, Acting Chief Financial Officer

FROM: Wayne Jernberg, Water System Manager
Water System

SUBJECT: **Resolution authorizing a three-year sub-award agreement with Grand Rapids Community College and the City for the expansion and regionalization of the West Michigan Water Career Program; the City shall be reimbursed in an amount not to exceed \$298,671 for costs incurred during the grant period**

In alignment with the City's Strategic Plan, Strategic Priority of Government Excellence, and Engaged and Connected Community, the City has been collaborating with Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) and Bay College since 2021 to address the labor shortage and aging workforce issues, which have been and continue to be a common trend among public water and wastewater utilities nationwide.

The collaboration was initiated through the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant. GRCC led the efforts by securing a \$500,000 grant to implement workforce development strategies in partnership with the City, Bay College, local school systems, and community-based organizations. The City was awarded \$164,409 as a sub-recipient to support these efforts. This first version of the grant concluded, and funds were expended in December of 2024.

Building on the program's success, the EPA invited GRCC to submit a second grant proposal to expand and regionalize it. As a result, the EPA awarded \$1 million to GRCC, Bay College, the City, the City of Holland, the City of Wyoming, Muskegon Heights, and Plainfield Charter Township. As a sub-recipient, the City is eligible to receive up to \$298,671 for all allowable costs incurred during the grant period from January 2025 to July 2027.

Since its inception, the program's success has been demonstrated by several measurable performance indicators:

- Expanded the City's existing Utility Aide program, allowing us to hire Utility Aide Interns and expose them to the water and wastewater industry through a hands-on paid internship. To date, 15 Utility Aide Interns have participated in the program. Of those, five have secured full-time permanent positions with the City, and ten are working in surrounding municipalities in the water/wastewater industry. Intern demographics are as follow:
 - 9 White
 - 1 Native American/Indigenous
 - 2 Black/African American
 - 3 Hispanic/Latino
 - 1 Veteran
- Organized and hosted unique community events, including Water Pool-ooza and Water Career Camps. A total of 371 people attended Water Pool-ooza events at the Lake Michigan Filtration Plant and Riverside Park. Ninety school-aged students in grades 6 through 9 attended the Water Career Camps.
- Participated in several job fairs, speaking engagements, community tabling events like Neighborhood Summits, Commission Night Outs, and other outreach opportunities that engaged with over 11,000 people of all ages within the city and across West Michigan.
- Visited several schools to speak on careers in the water industry and the importance of the urban water cycle, with nearly 1,000 students participating, ranging in age from 3rd grade to high school.
- Hosted tours of the City's water facilities, including the Lake Michigan Filtration Plant and the Water Resource Recovery Facility. Nearly 2,000 visitors learned about the City's operations and processes within the water and wastewater industry.

Overall, the partnership with GRCC and Bay College has proven to be an innovative and collaborative approach to tackling complex issues of labor shortages and misconceptions about water and sewer utilities. This will ultimately allow us to continue to meet our mission of providing our customers with safe and high-quality drinking water while exciting young people to get involved in careers that support this mission.

The program's new goals include:

- Expanding the program regionally to support the long-term workforce needs of the water utility sector.

- Continuing to increase public awareness of the importance of water and understanding of water treatment processes and infrastructure.
- Strengthening outreach and recruitment efforts to diversify the candidate pool for water-related careers.
- Increasing by 20% the number of individuals certified in water and wastewater treatment in the region.
- Enhancing the skill set of water utility employees to meet career advancement requirements.

The City, GRCC, Bay College, the City of Holland, the City of Wyoming, Muskegon Heights, and Plainfield Charter Township are excited to begin our collective work on the next iteration of the West Michigan Water Career Program.

Your FISCAL COMMITTEE recommends the adoption of the following resolution authorizing a three-year sub-award agreement with Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) and the City to continue and expand the West Michigan Water Career Program.

WHEREAS:

1. Grand Rapids Community College received a \$1 million grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to lead workforce development initiatives in collaboration with Bay College, the City, the City of Holland, the City of Wyoming, Muskegon Heights, and Plainfield Charter Township to address the emerging employment needs of water and sewer utilities; and
2. This partnership is an innovative and collaborative approach to tackling complex issues that public utilities are facing nationwide; and
3. The City is eligible to receive up to \$298,671 for all allowable costs incurred during the grant period from January 2025 to July 2027; therefore

RESOLVED:

1. That the City's Commission authorizes the three-year sub-award agreement in an amount not to exceed \$298,671 with Grand Rapids Community College to expand the West Michigan Water Career Program; and
2. That the Mayor is authorized to execute the sub-award agreement upon approval as to form by the City Attorney.

CORRECT IN FORM

CITY ATTORNEY