

Committee Report

Environment Committee



Committee Meeting Date: June 28, 2022

For the Metropolitan Council: July 13, 2022

Business Item: 2022-183

Innovative Water Conservation Pilot Project Grant, St Paul Regional Water Services

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize its Regional Administrator to award, negotiate and execute an Innovative Water Conservation Pilot Project Grant Agreement with St Paul Regional Water Services (SPRWS) recommended by staff in the total amount of \$250,000 for the years 2022 - 2024.

Summary of Environment Committee Discussion/Questions

The example of a vacant house which had a pipe break in December that went undetected until March was given. The leak lost almost 1 million gallons of water during that time.

Committee Member Zeran asked whether the house was considered a total loss given the amount of water damage. A representative of the SPRWS said they could only speculate that this was an accurate statement, noting that the water flow came from the upper area of the house which made it feasible to assume as such.

Committee Member Sterner inquired if this program would work similarly to the current Water Efficiency Program. Staff noted they were working to assist in the development of a rebate program, giving the power and flexibility to the communities to develop the program as best suits their needs.

Chair Wulff noted that not everyone that lives in an area of concentrated poverty is in poverty, and that communities need to be mindful of creating blanket approaches when they develop their individualized programs.

Committee Member Vento provided praise to SPRWS for their service to the community.

Motion by Committee Member Vento, seconded by Committee Member Fredson.

Motion carried.

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District(s), Member(s):	Directly Districts 10, 11, 13 and 14, Indirectly All
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minnesota Session Law 2021, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 8(b)
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Ali Elhassan, Manager, Water Supply Planning, 651-602-1066
Division/Department:	Environmental Services

Proposed Action

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Background

the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services would like to enter into a grant agreement with Saint Paul Regional Water Services (SPRWS) to begin a pilot project to improve water efficiency focusing on identifying leak issues much quicker using Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI). In addition, SPRWS will use a portion of the grant funds to support customers within areas of concentrated poverty in upgrading their toilets to more efficient devices.

In 2022 -2024, the Council will provide \$150,000 in grant money to SPRWS to install 7 AMI collectors in designated areas of concentrated poverty (ACPs) in Saint Paul. These collectors and applicable software will provide near real time data for an estimated 15,000 - 20,000 accounts (of SPRWS 95,000 accounts). SPRWS will contribute funding for Neptune 360 (\$1.30/account/year) for AMI data collection, along with approximately \$60,000/year to upgrade meter registers to be more compatible with AMI. In addition to these expenditures, SPRWS will staff a full time Meter Technician to coordinate the leak audit program. This employee will monitor data, communicate concerns to customers and educate on correction methods.

In addition to the grant funds requested for the AMI collectors, the Council will grant \$100,000 to SPRWS to fund a Water Efficiency Program that will support customers within areas of concentrated poverty in upgrading their toilets to more efficient devices. . SPRWS will work to provide replacement devices at no cost to these customers by purchasing devices in bulk, and partnering with the Plumbers Local #34 for cost effective installation. Where possible, SPRWS may work with local apartment complexes that have their own plumbing staff available to assist in installation.

Rationale

Many communities are addressing wasteful home water leaks through customer-focused leak audit programs. A leak audit program involves analysis of meter data to flag accounts suspected to have a leak based on significant increases in usage. The current practice for many of these leak audit

programs is to audit quarterly when meters are read, and customers are billed. While it is helpful to use the quarterly data to alert customers of potential concerns, in many cases the leak may have existed for weeks if not months by the time staff detects it. In a recent Metro Area Water Supply Advisory Committee (MAWSAC) meeting, a community suggested that the Council should consider supporting communities to include leak detection technology as part of the water efficiency grant program in the future.

AMI technology helps to identify leaks much quicker by using real time data opposed to needing to wait for quarterly readings. This quicker identification can help to save thousands of gallons of water daily. For example, one leaking toilet has the potential to waste over 5,000 gallons/day! By finding these leaks quicker and helping customers address the issues, AMI can help conserve water and protect customers from large costly utility bills.

Water demand in the Twin Cities metropolitan area is increasing in concert with population increase. This increase in water demand is placing greater stress on the water resources that provide potable water to the residents in the metropolitan area and contributing to the need for additional water supply infrastructure. Water Efficiency Grants provided financial aid to communities to replace old and inefficient toilets, clothes washers, irrigation controllers, irrigation spray heads, and dishwashers with more efficient WaterSense and Energy Star-labeled replacements.

This grant will allow the Council to achieve:

- Collaboration with SPRWS: first project with SPRWS which will open collaboration opportunities in the future. MCES through water supply programs has spent about \$7 million addressing issues in the region, but only 2% of that in the core cities that provide water to approximately 1 million people.
- Water Savings, sustainability of the resources and resiliency: the program will help SPRWS and served communities save hundreds of millions of gallons of water in the next few years, which will help reduce the need for more water towers, water supply wells, flow to wastewater system and other expensive infrastructure.
- Improving current water efficiency grant program: lessons learned from this pilot will be shared with other communities that face the leak detection issue and will allow Council staff to evaluate inclusion of leak detection technology in the water efficiency grant program. This grant pilot project also includes an equity component that will allow the Council staff to design future grant programs to tailor programs to better serve those who are economically disadvantaged and other underserved groups.
- Utilizing skilled trades to quickly deliver results while supporting the skillsets needed for water sustainability.

Thrive Lens Analysis

This action supports the Thrive MSP 2040 stewardship, equity and sustainability outcomes and the water sustainability goal of the Water Resources Policy Plan. This pilot project grant in Saint Paul fulfills the Master Water Supply Plan sustainability goals and improve regional resiliency.

Funding

The Innovative Water Conservation Pilot Project Grant is funded by the Minnesota Legislature, 2021 First Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 8(b).

Small Business Inclusion

The Office of Equity and Equal Opportunity reviewed this grant opportunity and determined that establishing a sub-contracting goal was not the best option for ensuring equity. Language will be included in the grant to require SPRWS to work with the union to encourage and identify opportunities for small business, labor, and apprentice labor from Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).

