

WATER SYSTEM STRATEGIC PLAN

FY 2022-2024



Message to our Community:

The Grand Rapids Water System is the second-largest community water supply in the state. We have a long history of providing safe and high-quality drinking water that protects public health and supports the local economy. We are a leader in water quality, and we continue to meet and exceed all regulatory requirements. As we look into the future, we have developed the FY22-FY24 Water System Strategic Plan that tackles many of the challenges public utilities face nationwide, including aging infrastructure, emerging contaminants, new regulatory requirements, and a decline in a skilled workforce.

When developing our strategic direction, we examined every aspect of our system and made the necessary changes and commitments to ensure its success. Additionally, we leveraged our values of respect, self-awareness, equitability, listening, accountability, collaboration, and reliability to guide our strategic direction. The Strategic Plan creates a road map for addressing many of the current and future challenges facing our utility. We structured the Strategic Plan around five strategic priorities, which are:

- Customer Experience
- Finance & Business Management
- Asset Management & Capital Planning
- Innovation & Sustainability
- Leadership & Employee Development

As we begin to implement the Strategic Plan, we are committed to tracking and evaluating our progress. This will include close attention to the effectiveness of this plan's strategic priorities, objectives, and ability to make the necessary changes or improvements.

Our Story:

The Grand Rapids Water System is one of the oldest community water systems in the state. The City formed and put into service the municipally-owned Grand Rapids Water System in 1875. Coldbrook Pump Station, located on Monroe, was built in 1910 and began distributing water from the Monroe Filtration Plant in 1912. The City treated water from the Grand River as its only source of water through 1940. In 1940, the City built a raw water pump station along the shores of Lake Michigan and began pumping raw water to the Monroe Filtration Plant for treatment. The Lake Michigan Filtration Plant, located in West Olive, Michigan, was built in 1962, then was expanded in 1990. At that time, Lake Michigan became the only water source for the Grand Rapids Water System as the Monroe Filtration Plant was taken out of service. The filtration plant draws its water supply from multiple intake structures nearly 1 mile from Lake Michigan's shore. The Low Lift Pump Stations then pumps the raw water to the filtration plant where it is treated. The treated drinking water is then pumped into the city through two transmission mains. One water main was built in 1940 and is 46 inches in diameter, while the other main was built in 1992 and is 60 inches in diameter.

- The filtration plant pumps an average of 35 million gallons per day
- We monitor over 80,000 water accounts and serve roughly 320,000 customers
- We maintain 1,270 miles of water distribution piping, 13,700 valves, 17 storages tanks, 13 pump stations, and 11,700 fire hydrants

The Grand Rapids Water System also supplies drinking water to several partner communities within the Grand Rapids metropolitan area, comprised of the city and its retail and wholesale customer communities. This includes the City of East Grand Rapids, City of Kentwood, City of Walker, portions of Ottawa County, Ada Township, Cascade Township, Grand Rapids Township, and Tallmadge Township.

Customer Experience

We will continue to be trusted leaders and willing partners with our community. We will strive to deliver an exceptional customer experience and communications plan that enhances the value of our services by listening to and engaging with our customers. The enhanced connections with our customers will improve overall service, exemplary water quality, trust, and transparency.

Objective 1: Increase community engagement, trust, and transparency

Strategies:

1. Update the Water System's vision and mission statement to reflect the values and goals of the department
2. Leverage the Water Advisory Council to implement a public awareness campaign to promote transparency and public health
3. Collaborate with neighborhood associations and other community groups to promote public awareness and build trust
4. Actively engage the community through public education, media, and communication
5. Develop additional tools like customer portals on the Water System webpage that allow staff to proactively respond to potential water complaints
6. Leverage strategic partnerships to expand our information distribution network
7. Institute an adopt a hydrant program to increase community interest and collaboration by updating documentation and outreach practices (keeping our community's hydrants clear of snow, ice, and tall grass help keep our neighborhoods safe)
8. Review and "re-fresh" our messages for the changing needs of our customers
9. Continue to develop additional ways to reach customers (email & phone) and leverage field staff to capture more accurate and additional site information from customers

Customer Experience

Objective 2: Review, track and continually improve levels of service

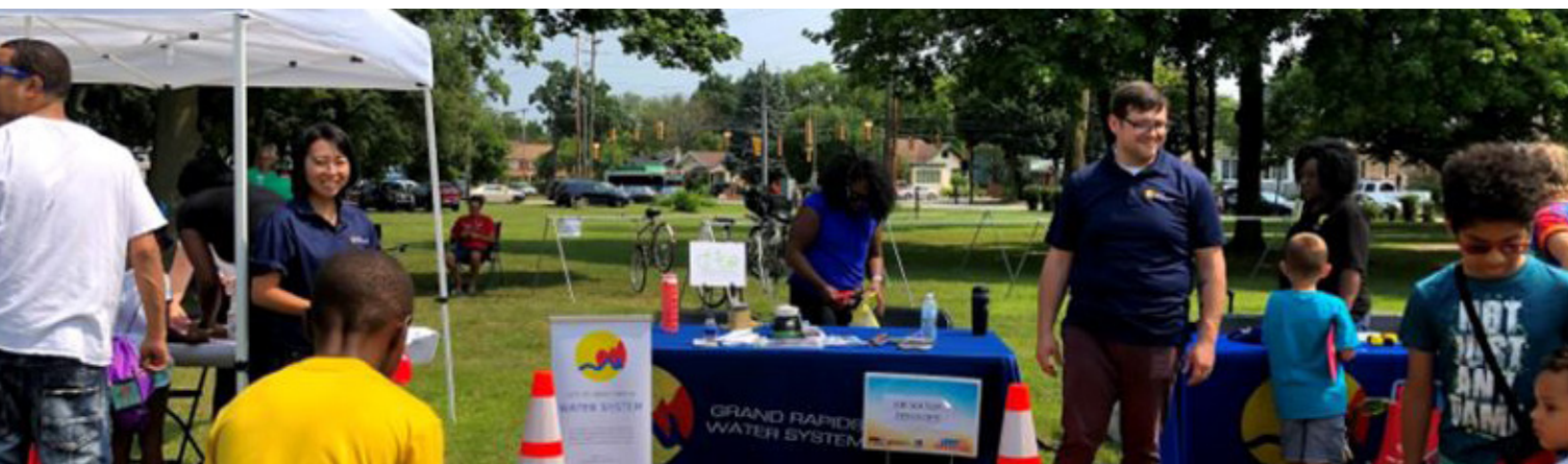
Strategies:

1. Implement a water utility customer satisfaction survey that will allow customers to provide feedback on how we are doing
2. Collaborate with 311 to continually update scripts
3. Wholesale community surveys to understand their needs in terms of water quality

Objective 3: Embed equity into all operations and services

Strategies:

1. Analyze water shutoff data quarterly and develop options concerning assistance programs to avoid shutoffs
2. Research and develop additional options for bill assistance programs



Finance and Business Management

We are a high-performing and innovative business committed to an ongoing process of continuous improvement, financial resiliency, and asset management. We will exercise good stewardship of financial and operating assets through the use of sound, cost-effective business judgment.

Objective 1: Leverage data to drive continuous improvement

Strategies:

1. Continuation of the Public Service Group Key Performance Indicator program
2. Participation in the AWWA benchmarking program
3. Development of baseline expectations for completions for specific work order types with an understanding that there will be periodic exceptions
4. Develop and implement a robust SOP program and database that incorporates an annual review with updates; change management process development
5. Conduct annual operational assessments of each division on a recurring rotation to identify efficiency opportunities, strengthens our culture, and drives continuous improvement
6. Conduct property analysis to drive cost-effective business decisions
7. Use staff entering homes and businesses to gather more data about the water use, piping, and other aspects of what is being done on the site, i.e., critical facilities

Finance and Business Management

Objective 2: Sustain a financial plan that supports our strategic direction

Strategies:

1. Use the annual Rate Study to evaluate fees and services
2. Adherence to budget and projections/forecasting
3. Stockroom improvements and explore opportunities to gain purchasing efficiencies
4. Maintain excellent debt coverage ratio and review annually to ensure current or better bond ratings
5. Leverage outside funding sources that help mitigate the impact on rates
6. Continue to streamline write-off and identifying foreclosure
7. Research and analyze beneficial outside service agreements



Asset Management and Capital Planning

We will work to re-invest in system assets in a planned and strategic way to leverage available dollars and ensure reliable system performance. This will push us to maintain and enhance the water system and collection system assets over the long-term at the lowest possible life cycle cost that minimizes possible risk, consistent with customer, community, and regulatory support service levels.

Objective 1: Reinvest, maintain, and enhance system assets and integrity

Strategies:

1. Re-invest in the water system assets in a planned and strategic way to leverage available resources and ensure reliable system performance
2. Update & implement the Asset Management Plan (AMP) and the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) to ensure that the Water System is considering all costs as we plan for the future
3. Continue monitoring and collaborating with ESD for stormwater and sanitary collection system maintenance goals
4. Replace all lead service lines in the next 20 years or per approved Asset Management Plan
5. Contract basin and manhole lining that increases operational efficiency and innovation
6. Leveraging CityWorks for business risk exposure development for all vertical and linear assets; become pro-active and less reactive
7. Annual audit of Cityworks reporting; assess and maintain necessary reports and archive those no longer necessary
8. Assess and adopt procedures that focus on streamlining asset repairs and maintenance
9. Develop a plan that focuses on the integrity of pump stations and vertical assets

Asset Management and Capital Planning

Objective 2: Develop, implement and document operational redundancy plans for the treatment and distribution system to ensure no interruptions in service

Strategies:

1. Have a vision of and practice emergency preparedness
2. Explore the development of tabletop exercises to help prepare staff for emergencies in our system as well as identify potential weak areas in our system assets



Innovation and Sustainability

The Water System will embrace, plan, review, and implement systems and tools that provide a long-term sustainable utility that leads the industry in environmental stewardship. We will plan to develop an integrated set of solutions that leverages people, processes, and technology to improve reliability, increase efficiency, reduce cost, drive innovation, and improve the customer experience.

Objective 1: Identify innovative utility practices to incorporate into operations and improve system efficiency

Strategies:

1. Implement AMI within the framework of a responsible budgeted and strategic plan
2. Research and implement a regional collaboration associated with meter and AMI equipment purchases and infrastructure
3. Invest and implement energy and pumping optimization tools that lead to inefficient equipment replacements or re-builds, as well as possible operational changes
4. Implement a solar power program at the LMFP through a partnership that allows the City to save money on electricity while allowing for panel ownership and maintenance responsibilities by others
5. Develop a strategic valve turning program
6. Leverage operational data to drive energy-efficient programs that help reduce overall operational costs
7. Develop and implement facility safety measures at our primary facilities to ensure a safe working environment
8. Expand on existing network data transmission capacity with additional fiber connections at our pumping and storage facilities that allow for efficiency gains through automated security systems; automated gate systems controlled by the LMFP Operators

Innovation and Sustainability

Objective 2: Protect and preserve our water resources

1. Identify and assess water conservation strategies within city operations and for customers and the potential impacts on our operations
2. Implement the source water intake protection plan/integrated data management platform
3. Monitor annual water loss data and look for options that could reduce non-billed water
4. Explore development in partnership with ESD for additional water quality monitoring stations for the Grand River



Innovation and Sustainability

Objective 3: Achieve 100% Regulatory compliance

Strategies:

1. Maintain exemplary water quality while well within regulatory requirements
2. On-time submission of required applications, plans, and reports
3. Work to streamline and gain efficiencies in the development of regular monitoring documents and reports



Leadership and Employee Development

The Water System is committed to attracting, hiring, training, and retaining high performing employees while further identifying and developing our future leaders. We will support and develop a workforce that is aligned with our vision to provide superior service to our customers.

Objective 1: Strengthen internal workforce professional development

Strategies:

1. Leverage the new learning management system to provide additional professional development opportunities to all
2. Identify critical leadership and operational positions and develop a comprehensive succession plan
3. Work with risk to continue to offer safety training and emergency response readiness training in-house or through a vendor
4. Use the annual employee evaluation process as an opportunity to engage around desired outcomes and professional goals more deeply
5. Create individual performance goals anchored to strategic planning and operational priorities
6. Develop a comprehensive training program to promote the transfer of technical knowledge and continuing education for all employees
7. Ensure mentoring opportunities are available for all staff

Leadership and Employee Development

Objective 2: Examine organizational structure and staffing strategies to ensure an adequate pipeline of quality employees

Strategies:

1. Develop internship and apprenticeship programs to increase the pipeline of candidates through the utility Aide Program
2. Research and develop equitable skilled trades incentives within the framework of the collective bargaining process
3. Develop a workforce that relates to and reflects the values of the City and the community we serve
4. Frequently review classifications to ensure organizational alignment and market competitiveness
5. Examine vacancies to determine optimum staffing levels



Leadership and Employee Development

Objective 3: Develop and maintain a workplace culture based on City and department values that improves employee communications, engagement, and satisfaction

Strategies:

1. Improve internal communication to enhance staff awareness and engagement
2. Develop and implement an annual employee recognition program that is centered around the core City values and the highest level of service to our citizens
3. Develop an employee satisfaction survey that captures workplace culture and areas of improvement
4. Reinforce partnerships with bargaining units to promote a spirit of cooperation, respect, and trust
5. Provide cooperative cross-functional problem-solving opportunities



Leadership and Employee Development

Objective 4: Develop programs designed to educate school-aged kids about the water industry

Strategies:

1. Develop and promote initiatives like the pathways to prosperity program
2. Build a partnership with Grand Rapids Public School for opportunities to engage school-aged kids about the value of water and the opportunities in this industry
3. Continue to promote the Imagine a Day Without Water Writing Contest; look for newer ways to broaden this message

