Agenda – Executive Policy Committee – November 18, 2025

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Water, Waste and Environment – November 3, 2025

Item No. 2 H2O Help to Others Policy Update and Outreach

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On November 3, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Water, Waste and Environment concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service, as amended, and submitted the following to Council:

1. That the updated H2O Help to Others Policy, attached as Appendix A, be approved.

2. That, in the interest of maintaining the City's focus on affordability, the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back to the Committee in 180 days with a briefing on affordability impacts including data on H2O program uptake, utility rate changes, customer arrears, and related affordability indicators as part of regular reporting on water and waste services, including information on departmental efforts to provide education for compliance.

3. That the department use the information from Recommendation 2 to guide future changes to the program.

4. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Water, Waste and Environment – November 3, 2025

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On November 3, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Water, Waste and Environment passed the following motion:

WHEREAS the City of Winnipeg has an ongoing interest in supporting affordability and protecting vulnerable residents facing rising costs of living;

AND WHEREAS the H2O Help to Others Program provides essential support to low-income customers at risk of water service disconnection, and proposed updates will align the program with Manitoba Hydro's Neighbours Helping Neighbours initiative to improve accessibility and eligibility;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service be concurred in with the following amendments:

- Add the following new Recommendation 2:

  "2. That, in the interest of maintaining the City's focus on affordability, the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back to the Committee in 180 days with a briefing on affordability impacts including data on H2O program uptake, utility rate changes, customer arrears, and related affordability indicators as part of regular reporting on water and waste services, including information on departmental efforts to provide education for compliance."

- Add the following new Recommendation 3:

  "3. that the department use the information from Recommendation 2 to guide future changes to the program."

- That the remaining Recommendation be renumbered accordingly.

and submitted the matter to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: H2O Help to Others Policy Update and Outreach

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Water, Waste and Environment – Executive Policy Committee – Council

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
Y. Cenerini, Manager of Customer Engagement and Strategic Services	T. W. Shanks, M. Eng., P. Eng. Director, Water and Waste	T. Graham	J. Dunford

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Service is recommending changes to the H2O Help to Others Program (H2O) to align with recent updates to the Manitoba Hydro Neighbours Helping Neighbours Program.

This requires an update to the H2O Help to Others Policy to adjust eligibility requirements.

The application process is being simplified, and the program will be marketed more widely.

These program changes are expected to make it easier for low-income residential customers to access financial assistance when they are facing disconnection of their water service and have no resources to pay their utility bill.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the updated H2O Help to Others Policy, attached as Appendix A, be approved.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

Council approval is required to update the H2O Help to Others Policy.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Funds for the H2O Help to Others Program are budgeted in the annual current operating budget of the Water and Sewer Utilities. The value of credits approved for this program is expected to increase with more customers applying and being eligible to receive credits but is still projected to be within budget.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

On June 21, 2017, Council approved the establishment of the H2O Help to Others Program (H2O), based on the policy outlined in the existing Council Policy WW-005.

H2O is a customer assistance program designed to help low-income customers who are facing disconnection of their water service, due to non-payment of their utility bill. It has been administered by the Salvation Army, on behalf of the City of Winnipeg, since the program was introduced in 2017.

In addition to assisting customers with their application to H2O, the Salvation Army is also able to provide applicants with referrals to a variety of other community and government programs that provide assistance in times of crisis. For example, the Salvation Army may refer applicants to the Manitoba Rent Relief Fund program, which provides financial assistance to low- to moderate-income residents struggling to pay rent and utilities.

The Program was modeled after the Neighbours Helping Neighbours Program offered by Manitoba Hydro for energy bills, which is also currently administered by the Salvation Army.

On September 22, 2025, Manitoba Hydro introduced two changes to the eligibility requirements for its program, opening up its program to customers on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) and allowing customers to apply every two years (instead of limiting eligibility to one time only).

Recommended updates to the H2O Help to Others Policy are being introduced to align with these changes. Additional changes to improve the application process and increase consistency and clarity throughout the Policy have also been included in the update.

Recommended Policy Changes and Outreach

<u>Eligibility Requirements</u>

To qualify for the current H2O, customers must show that:

- They don’t have the resources to pay their utility bill and are facing water service disconnection.
- Their household income is lower than Statistics Canada’s pre-tax low-income cut-off.
- The utility account for their residence is in their name.
- They are not receiving social assistance.
- Neither themselves nor any other member of their household has received assistance from H2O in the past.
- Their account has been billed to an actual water meter reading or they are willing to provide a current water meter reading.

- They have not been convicted of violating either the Water or Sewer By-law in the past five years.

The Public Service recommends that the eligibility requirements for H2O be revised, to align with Manitoba Hydro's Neighbours Helping Neighbours Program, by making the following changes:

- An applicant's total household income must be lower than Statistics Canada's post-tax low-income cut-off (instead of the pre-tax low-income cut-off).
- Applicants on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) will now be eligible to apply.
- Customers will be eligible to apply every two years, outside a 24-month period.

The updated H2O Help to Others Policy, attached as Appendix A, has been revised to reflect these changes to the eligibility requirements.

Application Process

Currently, customers must complete an application form, downloadable from the MyUtility portal, and make an appointment with the Salvation Army. The application requires customers to provide proof of identification (i.e. driver's licence), and proof of income per the Council Policy. Applicants are also expected to describe, in writing, the factors which should be considered in assessing their ability to pay their utility bill (i.e. house fire, illness, job loss, separation/divorce), which can be traumatic and may feel like a violation of privacy. Applicants must then meet with the Salvation Army to review their application and provide required documentation.

The Manitoba Hydro application process is much simpler. Applicants must make an appointment with Salvation Army staff, and, together, they work through the application form. The Salvation Army will review annual income tax assessments, but will also consider monthly bank statements, when considering an applicant's eligibility, as the applicant's financial situation may have changed from the previous year. Applicants are able to share their personal situation with Salvation Army staff, without having to document it in writing.

Customers who are struggling to pay their water utility bill may also be struggling to pay their energy utility bill, so they may be submitting applications to both the City of Winnipeg and Manitoba Hydro programs at the same time. The H2O application process is being revised to match Manitoba Hydro's application process, to make it simpler for customers to apply and to make it easier for the Salvation Army to process applications.

Maximum Credit Amounts

The updated H2O Council Policy allows for the maximum credit to be adjusted annually to reflect increases to utility rates approved by Council.

The credit amounts were revised earlier this year to reflect the March 2025 approved increase to the sewer volume rates and the introduction of the Waste Management Fee. The maximum credit amounts currently vary from $280 for a one-person household, to $580 for a household of five or more people.

Going forward, maximum credit amounts will be adjusted year by year, as rates and fees change.

Program Marketing and Outreach

To date, H2O has been promoted mainly by Utility Billing Centre billing representatives when speaking to customers, through the program information available online on the MyUtility portal (myutility.winnipeg.ca), and by the Salvation Army.

To increase the visibility of the program, the Public Service will reach out to various government agencies and community organizations to provide program information. The list includes but is not limited to the following:

- Province of Manitoba:
    - Department of Families
        - Employment and Income Assistance (EIA)
        - Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities (Manitoba Supports)
        - Disability and Health Supports Unit (DHSU)
        - Child and Family Services
    - Manitoba Housing – Manitoba Rent Relief Fund
    - Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care – Manitoba Seniors Guide
- Community Organizations:
    - 211 Manitoba
    - Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM)
    - Indigenous Senior Resource Centre (Wpg)
    - Agape Table
    - Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
    - Main Street Project
    - Mount Carmel Clinic
    - Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Cooperation
    - Spence Neighbourhood Association
    - Seed Winnipeg
    - West Central Women's Resource Centre
    - Community Financial Counselling Services
    - North End Community Renewal Corporation
    - Manitoba Start
    - Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation
    - New Journey Housing
    - North Point Douglas Women's Centre

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement

Date: September 19, 2025

Project Name:
H2O Help to Others Policy Update and Outreach

First Year of Program **2026**

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Capital					
Capital Expenditures Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Less: Existing Budgeted Costs	-	-	-	-	-
Additional Capital Budget Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Funding Sources:					
Debt - Internal	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Debt - External	-	-	-	-	-
Grants (Enter Description Here)	-	-	-	-	-
Reserves, Equity, Surplus	-	-	-	-	-
Other - Enter Description Here	-	-	-	-	-
Total Funding	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Additional Capital Budget Required	$ -				
Total Additional Debt Required	$ -				
Current Expenditures/Revenues					
Direct Costs	$ 52,000	$ 53,000	$ 54,000	$ 55,000	$ 56,000
Less: Incremental Revenue/Recovery	-	-	-	-	-
Net Cost/(Benefit)	$ 52,000	$ 53,000	$ 54,000	$ 55,000	$ 56,000
Less: Existing Budget Amounts	52,000	53,000	54,000	55,000	56,000
Net Budget Adjustment Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -

Additional Comments: Costs for the H2O program are encompassed in the Water and Sewer Utility's policy adjustments annual operating budget account distribution 44X-586012-200001 999.The annual budget amounts for policy adjustments are adjusted by estimated water and sewer rate increases. Costs above reflect the annual projected budget and include an expected increase in applications to the H2O Program. Actual program costs associated with this report will vary based on the number of applications received each year. The financial impact of the recommendations in this report will be absorbed within the current proposed budgets for policy adjustments in the Water and Sewer Utilities.

A. Neufeld for
Lucy Szkwarek, FCPA, FCGA
Manager of Finance and Administration

/aw
19-Sep-25

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

- THe Salvation Army
- Legal Services

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

This report is in accordance with the OurWinnipeg 2045 policies through:

Goal: Leadership and Good Governance

Objective 2: Promote trust and government responsiveness through meaningful, inclusive and informed community engagement.

Policy 1.7: Equitable Service Access

Goal: Economic Prosperity

Objective 3: Address poverty as an unacceptable and costly outcome of systemic barriers, through collaboration with the community and government bodies.

Goal: Social Equity

Objective 3: Build social cohesion through community development solutions, coordinated, effective partnerships, and responsive service delivery.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan and its Goals and Objectives, and it was determined that the Climate Action Plan is not applicable to this specific report.

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

This report is in accordance with the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy through:

Goal 4: Community Well-Being Supports for those in Greatest Need are Increased

Objective C: Strategic partnerships to connect people to needed supports are developed.

Goal 6: All City Services are Equitable, Inclusive and Accessible

Objective A: Residents have equitable access to City services, in particular demographic groups who experience marginalization.

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Water and Waste Department
Division: Customer Engagement and Strategic Services
Prepared by: Yvette Cenerini
Date: September 25, 2025
File No.: A-017

APPENDIX A

Winnipeg

CITY OF WINNIPEG POLICY NO.

POLICY TITLE *H2O Help to Others*	**ADOPTED BY** *City Council*	**EFFECTIVE DATE**
ORIGIN / AUTHORITY *City Council*	**CITY POLICY NO.**	**MOST RECENT CONSOLIDATION**

1. Purpose:

The purpose of this Policy is to describe the requirements and administration of the H2O Help to Others Program, which provides financial assistance to eligible low-income customers facing disconnection of their water service.

2. Definitions:

2.1 **"H2O Credit"** means the credit described in section 3.2 of this Policy.

2.2 **"H2O Program"** means the H2O Help to Others Program approved by Council.

2.3 **"Program Administrator"** means the individual or organization designated by the City to administer the H2O Program in accordance with this Policy.

2.4 **"Turn-off Notice"** means a notice issued by the Water and Waste Department which states water service will be stopped if the account is not paid within the period specified in the notice.

2.5 **"Utility Bill"** means a bill issued by the Water and Waste Department that includes water service, and may include sewer, solid waste and other services.

3. H2O Help to Others Program

3.1 Eligibility

To be eligible for assistance from the H2O Program, the applicant must meet all the following conditions:

a) The applicant is the current utility account holder and resident at the service address. H2O credits will not be approved for commercial, rental or multi-family dwelling properties.

b) The service address of the applicant is about to face disconnection of water service due to non-payment of its outstanding utility account balance.

c) The applicant has met with the Program Administrator to complete an application and has provided information or other documentation required by the Program Administrator to determine H2O Program eligibility and/or the H2O Credit, which will include but not be limited to proof of current total household income.

d) The applicant has satisfied the Program Administrator that the applicant and its household are in an emergency situation, where there are no resources to pay the Utility Bill.

e) The applicant's total household income, which includes the income of all adults living in the home, is below Statistics Canada post-Tax Low Income Cut-off.

f) The amount owing on the applicant's utility account is billed to an actual reading, or an actual meter reading is submitted by the applicant with its application.

g) The applicant or any other member of the applicant's household has not received assistance from the H2O Program within the two (2) years prior to the date of their application.

h) The applicant has not been convicted of a violation of the Water By-law or Sewer By-law in the past five (5) years.

3.2 H2O Credits

Applicants who qualify for the H2O Program will receive the lesser of:

1. The balance outstanding on the Turn-off Notice; or

2. The maximum credit for the household, which is calculated based on:
   (a) average water use by household size;
   (b) Council-approved rates for water, sewer, and solid waste service; and
   (c) any other required fees included on the Utility Bill.

   Maximum credits will be adjusted annually, if required, to reflect increases to utility rates approved by Council.

4. Notice to Applicants

Following review of a submitted application, the Water and Waste Department must mail a decision letter to the applicant's residence listed in the application, which shall indicate the amount of approved H2O Credit or an explanation of why no H2O Credit has been approved.

The decision letter must advise applicants they may appeal the decision to the Utility Credit Review Committee within 30 days, by mailing an appeal to the address specified in the decision letter.

5. Appeal Process

Applicants who are not approved for an H2O Credit, or who feel the approved H2O Credit is not consistent with this Policy, may appeal in writing to the Utility Credit Review Committee within 30 days of the date of the decision letter. The applicant may provide any additional documentation to the Utility Credit Review Committee that they feel is necessary to support their appeal.

Applicants who feel their needs will not be adequately met by a written appeal may request their appeal be made in person to the Committee.

5.1 Utility Credit Review Committee

The Utility Credit Review Committee will include three members as follows:

a) Manager, Finance and Administration, Water and Waste Department
b) Manager, Customer Engagement and Strategic Services, Water and Waste Department
c) Third manager appointed by the Director, Water and Waste Department. This member may be appointed for a single meeting or for a set period, as determined by the Director.

5.2 Committee Decisions

The Utility Credit Review Committee shall meet within two weeks after a written appeal has been received.

The Committee must send a formal letter to the applicant within 30 days of its meeting date outlining the Committee's decision on the appeal.

H2O Credits approved by the Committee must be consistent with section 3.2 of this Policy.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Applicant – In order to receive an H2O Credit, the applicant must:

a) Meet with the Program Administrator to complete their application; and
b) Provide all documents required by the Program Administrator.

6.2 Program Administrator – The Program Administrator shall administer the H2O Program pursuant to its agreement with the City and this Policy, which includes:

a) Meeting with applicants to assess their eligibility for the H2O Program;
b) Submitting completed applications to the H2O Program on behalf of applicants; and
c) Providing recommendations to the City regarding applicant eligibility and any applicable H2O Credit amount.

6.3 Director, Water and Waste Department – The Director, or their delegate, shall:

a) Review recommendations of the Program Administrator to confirm eligibility and proposed H2O credits are consistent with the Policy.
b) Approve or deny H2O Program applications and provide notice of decision to applicants in accordance with this Policy.
c) Where approved, ensure that customer utility accounts are credited with H2O Credit.
d) Appoint the chair and members of the Utility Credit Review Committee and ensure that appeals are conducted according to this Policy

6.4 Chair, Utility Credit Review Committee – The Chair of the Utility Credit Review Committee shall:

a) Convene a meeting of the Utility Credit Review Committee within two (2) weeks of receiving a written appeal.

b) Issue a letter within 30 days of the meeting date outlining the Committee's decision on the appeal.