Water Asset Management Council

Vision for the Future

March 2025

Overview

The Michigan Water Asset Management Council (WAMC) was established to guide and support communities in developing and enhancing water asset management programs. Charged by the legislature to create asset management templates and report annually to the Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC), the WAMC plays a critical role in assessing the condition of water infrastructure and investments across the state.

Recognizing the evolving challenges in water infrastructure management, including aging systems and shifting regulatory landscapes, the WAMC identified the need to outline its strategic priorities. To support this effort, Public Sector Consultants (PSC) worked closely with WAMC leadership to facilitate a strategic planning process that established a clear vision, well-defined goals and objectives, and desired outcomes to guide the future work plans of the WAMC. Details of the strategic planning process are included in the appendix.

The WAMC now has four clear goals to focus its efforts and ensure it can meet its legislative mandate in Public Act 324 of 2018. Coupled with transparent objectives and clearly defined measures for success, the WAMC is well positioned to turn this strategic plan into actionable next steps. By doing so, it can remain a valuable resource to Michigan water systems, the MIC, the public, and the state to make informed decisions on water infrastructure asset management.

WAMC Strategic Plan Overview

Vision

The Water Asset Management Council (WAMC), working with others, will foster a culture of water infrastructure asset management that supports water utility systems in achieving their local goals and highlights the critical role of asset management in protecting public health, preserving the environment, and enhancing stakeholder value.

Values

Partnership: Partner with other organizations across Michigan to develop a strong network committed to leading on asset management education and implementation.

Advocacy: Advocate at the state and local levels to convey the value of proper asset management and the role WAMC can play in its support.

Collaboration: Collaborate with others to work with water utilities of all sizes to build a cohesive culture centered around asset management.

Education: Educate practitioners and the public on the value of asset management in water infrastructure in partnership with the Michigan Infrastructure Council.

Goals

1. Enhance the accessibility and insights derived from effective and efficient collection and analysis of water system infrastructure data.

2. Identify opportunities to build technical capacity to equitably support water systems and guide systems in adopting industry-wide best practices in asset management.

3. Achieve sustainable funding for water system asset management.

4. Ensure WAMC has the tools and resources to successfully support effective water system asset management.

Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

Goal One

Enhance the accessibility and insights derived from effective and efficient collection and analysis of water system infrastructure data.

Objectives

1. Define a standardized framework for required asset management data collection aligned with regulatory and operational needs.
2. Provide meaningful input into the interoperability of state systems to improve data-sharing mechanisms to streamline workflows.
3. Identify and communicate benefits of participation in asset management data sharing with the WAMC.
4. Harmonize data requirements with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) standards to ensure consistency and streamlined reporting.
5. Develop tools for the WAMC to capture actionable insights, support trend analysis, and enable long-term tracking.
6. Ease water utilities' data submission when reporting on assets.

Outcomes

- The development and maintenance of a robust data acquisition strategy that maximizes value and minimizes risk for participating water systems.
- The establishment of a state-sponsored water asset management platform (i.e., a one-stop shop) that meets the needs of regulatory agencies, utilities, and the WAMC.
- The creation of a standard dataset that is used by water utilities, the WAMC, and regulators with simplified collection methods that reduce users' administrative burden.
- Water systems are empowered with accessible, data-driven asset management and infrastructure insights that drive real impact.

Goal Two

Identify opportunities to build technical capacity to equitably support water systems and guide systems in adopting industry-wide best practices in asset management.

Objectives

1. Provide the MIC information on appropriate, useful, and accessible continuing education credits for the water workforce.
2. Develop resources that make asset management more accessible for low-resource communities.
3. Assist the MIC with education and outreach efforts to promote awareness and adoption of asset management best practices across water systems.
4. Assist the MIC in the expansion of the Asset Management Champions program.

Outcomes

- Water system personnel and operators are trained in asset management applications and uses.
- Community leaders and policy makers support asset management principles and are committed to data driven decisions.
- Communities are utilizing asset management approaches in managing water infrastructure.

Goal Three

Achieve sustainable funding for water system asset management.

Objectives

1. Identify and share communication strategies that clearly articulate the need for sustainable funding for water utilities asset management.
2. Collaborate with external partners and associations to share funding recommendations and policy priorities.
3. Advise the MIC on the needs of local water systems to support effective water assessment management.

Outcomes

- There is more public awareness of water systems' conditions and the necessary capital expenses and maintenance costs to deliver water and wastewater services.
- A long-term sustainable funding strategy for water asset management has been established.

Goal Four

Ensure WAMC has the tools and resources to successfully support effective water system asset management.

Objectives

1. Review and suggest modifications to the WAMC enacting legislation, as appropriate to its role and relevancy.
2. Establish a funding source for WAMC operations.
3. Determine an administrative home for the WAMC.

Outcomes

- The WAMC is an effective advisory board to the State of Michigan and provides valuable data and insights to water utilities and external partners.
- The State of Michigan has an effective water asset management strategy.

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Appendix: Strategic Planning Process

The Water Asset Management Council (WAMC) was created to guide communities in managing and improving their drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems. The WAMC engaged Public Sector Consultants (PSC) to update and refine its strategic goals and implementation strategies in alignment with its charge under Public Act 324 of 2018. The primary goals of this process were to establish a clear vision, set short-term priorities, and develop a multiyear work plan for the WAMC. PSC worked closely with WAMC staff in executing the following scope of work:

- Facilitating project kickoff (October 1, 2024)
- Preplanning discovery meetings (October 3 and 21, 2024)
- Facilitating strategic planning session one (October 24, 2024)
- Facilitating strategic planning session two (November 14, 2024)
- Developing and refining WAMC's mission, vision, values, goals, and objectives (December 5, 2024, and January 10, 2025)
- Delivering draft strategic plan content to the WAMC group for review (January 23, 2025)

Strategic Planning Sessions

Preworkshop Discovery

Before the strategic planning sessions, PSC facilitated two preworkshop discovery meetings with the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and WAMC leadership to assess the organization's current landscape and needs. PSC inquired about WAMC's operations, strategies for success, obstacles to success, and external factors impacting the organization. Insights gained from these discussions, along with a review of relevant legislation and the Michigan Infrastructure Council's (MIC's) 30-Year Strategic Plan, provided the framework for the subsequent strategic planning workshops.

WAMC's Current State and Challenges

WAMC members are passionate and committed to improving water asset management; however, they face significant administrative and financial barriers. The group lacks the resources and authority necessary to fully meet its statutory mandates. Administrative support from EGLE is limited due to budget constraints and misaligned objectives between the organizations. Additionally, overlapping responsibilities with the MIC have led to redundancy and challenges in data collection efforts.

Opportunities for Structural and Strategic Change

WAMC leadership proposed investigating potential changes to WAMC's administrative home and exploring additional funding sources. To reduce redundancy and streamline data collection, leadership suggested further integration with the MIC. They also emphasized the need to explore funding avenues and statutory revisions to improve WAMC's operations. Leadership highlighted the importance of establishing a clear vision and well-defined tasks to ensure efforts are goal-oriented rather than constrained by available resources.

Strategic Planning Session One

The first strategic planning session took place in person with WAMC members and PSC on October 24, 2024. After the introduction, PSC provided an overview of the strategic planning process and session goals. This session focused on reviewing foundational documents, envisioning the future of the WAMC, discussing the mission and core values, assessing WAMC's operating environment, and building consensus on priority actions.

Grounding Documents

To establish context, the session began with reviews of the legislation that created the WAMC and of the MIC's 30-Year Integrated Strategy, emphasizing WAMC's specific mandates and their implementation. Members noted that these directives have not been fully realized due to limited data collection, low participation, lack of incentives, and inadequate tools, making comprehensive asset management assessments difficult. The MIC's long-term strategy supports WAMC by promoting training, data collection, and utility collaboration to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and build public trust.

Envisioning the Future

Participants engaged in a victory circle exercise to define success for the WAMC. Members identified key indicators of success, including increased infrastructure coordination, strengthened partnerships with water associations, streamlined reporting tools that meet regulatory requirements without duplication, and enhanced funding to fully support asset management systems. Ultimately, members envisioned WAMC playing a critical role in shifting public perceptions about the importance of asset management.

EXHIBIT 1. Victory Circle

Mission and Core Values

Following the visioning exercise, PSC presented WAMC's current goal statement for reflection and discussion. Members emphasized that WAMC should be an advocate for communities, ensuring a desired level of service at the most cost-effective level. They agreed that WAMC should support asset management systems in achieving their goals. By the end of this session, the group finalized a first draft of the mission statement.

Afterward, members identified WAMC's core values, which included collaboration and inclusivity across utilities of different sizes, education and advocacy, expertise in best practices, and continuous learning. They also emphasized the importance of leadership in demonstrating these values and fostering a supportive environment.

Assessing the Current WAMC Environment

PSC overviewed insights gained from the premeeting sessions with WAMC leadership on the strengths of the council, the current barriers facing the council, and existing barriers limiting the council's accomplishments. The WAMC members discussed these items, offering feedback on aspects that were not previously addressed.

Confirmed Successes: The WAMC members agreed that the current members' dedication, expertise, and commitment to asset management are strengths. All members recognized the necessity for updates to WAMC's structure and were prepared to be advocates for change. In addition to partnering with organizations like the MIC, members mentioned the importance of connecting with other associations contributing to water and asset management. Members also noted the benefit of viewing the Transit Asset Management Council (TAMC) as an existing roadmap for how the WAMC should function.

Identified Challenges: Current barriers to WAMC success included insufficient funding and resources to meet statutory requirements, unclear legislation that does not provide a clear mandate for the WAMC, and difficulties collecting meaningful data. Legislation that directs the WAMC is also outdated due to the rapid changes in the water sector, and the WAMC members noted there is a need for greater awareness and involvement from the legislature. The group also noted there are challenges with overlapping and undefined roles among agencies adjacent to WAMC.

Opportunities for Improvement: Most of the opportunities for the WAMC to improve involve advocacy and expanding partnerships with other organizations. The WAMC members agreed there is a prospect to advocate for legislative support and seek statutory changes surrounding the mandate directing WAMC's initiatives. There is also an opportunity to enhance partnerships with the MIC and EGLE, specifically to connect data across the MIC, TAMC, and the WAMC.

Building Consensus

Using the information from the previous discussion as basis, the final portion of the first strategic planning session was to brainstorm answers to the question, "what actions can the WAMC take to better support water utilities and provide more useful data and information to the legislature?" The group took time to write down ideas and then worked with PSC to group the ideas into broader categories. The group then drafted temporary titles for each of these categories. By the end of this exercise, the group developed eight broad goal categories that contained answers to the question (Exhibit 2).

EXHIBIT 2. Consensus-Building Activity Results

Data Strategy	Capacity-Building	Simplify Data Submission	Funding	Common Evaluation Criteria	More Expertise and Collaboration	Carrots	Education on Water
• Intentional data collection and explaining the value of participation • Create and publish a dashboard that mirrors TAMC • Increased awareness • Value of data collected (return on investment) • Provide Asset management guidance for vertical assets	• Technical assistance • Small system support • Share best practices for asset management • Inform systems on best practices	• Ease of submission, joint/combo • Standard asset management template (WAMC and EGLE) • Create new tools that are easy to use	• Advocate for funding • Advocate for funding/level of spending over many years • Advocate for single agency for staffing & funding	• Provide asset management guidance for pressure pipes • Common evaluation criteria	• Training (workshops, best practices, demonstration projects) • Develop more Asset Management Champions with other partners • Provide great examples of successful utility partnerships	• Incentives (grant points) • Provide incentives grants to develop asset management plans (updates) • Provide free asset management software	• Educate on the value and needs of systems • Collaborate with the MIC to provide water utility specific training for elected officials

Session One Follow-Up

After the session, PSC provided a summary document outlining the drafted vision, core values, and goals for members to review. PSC then met with WAMC leadership to refine these elements before presenting the revised content at the next session.

Strategic Planning Session Two

The second strategic planning session was held in person with WAMC members and PSC on November 14, 2024. The second session began with reviewing the strategic plan process and recapping the work that was completed in the first session. The remining components of this session included an introduction to action planning, drafting objectives, and discussing next steps in the process.

Session One Recap

PSC presented the WAMC members with the drafted vision, core values, and goal statements, which were revised from session one after meeting with the WAMC leadership. PSC then led the group through a robust discussion of each component, allowing all WAMC members to provide feedback and reflection. The results of this session were modified vision, core values, and goal statements that incorporated member feedback.

Developing Objectives

After solidifying the drafted goals, the group moved forward to developing objectives for each goal. PSC introduced action planning, noting that objectives should be clear and support achieving the goals moving forward. The WAMC members then participated in a group brainstorming activity in which each member contributed to writing objectives under the developed goals.

Following the initial drafting of the objectives, the entire WAMC group came together to review the content. PSC led the group through a discussion of the objective language, allowing members to highlight the three to five most important objectives under each goal.

Postworkshop Meetings

Following the second session, PSC refined the objectives and presented them to WAMC leadership for further review. Two follow-up meetings were held to ensure alignment with WAMC's vision and values. After finalizing the language, PSC presented the revised strategic plan content to the broader WAMC membership for feedback. The refined content was then shared with the MIC and other water asset management organizations for additional input.

EGLE

Michigan Water Asset Management Council

Michigan Infrastructure Council

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