



DATE: 11/19/2024      TIME: 9:00 a.m.      LOCATION: Executive Boardroom

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Janet Howard, Chair | Tamika Duplessis, Ph.D. | Joseph Peychaud |  
| Maurice Sholas, M.D., Ph.D. | Chadrick Kennedy |

# Operations Committee Meeting Agenda

## PUBLIC MEETING

All meetings are open to the public, and we encourage your attendance.  
Those interested can join in person or virtually.

**Join In-Person:** Executive Board Room, Second Floor  
625 St. Joseph St., New Orleans, LA 70165

**Join Virtually:** <https://www.swbno.org/BoardMeetings>

E-Public comments will be accepted via <https://www.swbno.org/BoardMeetings>.  
All e-public comments must be received at least 2 hours prior to the meeting. Comments  
will be read verbatim into the record.

## I. Roll Call

## II. Presentation Items

- A. Billing Update – Susannah Kirby, Interim Chief Customer Service Officer
- B. People Plan Update – Jamie Parker, Director of Planning & Strategy

## III. Public Comment

## IV. Adjournment



# Legislative Updates

2024 Regular Session

## Fixed Billing ([Act 393](#))

- Residential customers can opt-in to fixed billing until a smart meter is installed
- Fixed rate calculation is based on the average of past 12 months of water use (excluding disputed bills)
- Fixed rate billing began in October
- 243 customers have chosen fixed billing as of 11/15/2024

## Estimated Billing Prohibited ([Act 703](#))

- SWBNO prohibited from submitting a bill based on estimated services beginning January 1, 2025
- Prepared to conduct monthly actual reads on remaining mechanical meters based on installation pace of smart meters
- If an actual meter read cannot be obtained prior to bill production, customer will be billed for “ready to serve” charges only
- Consumption not billed (but based on actual read) will be included in the following month’s consumption charges

## Arbitration Program ([Act 393](#))

- Two arbiters appointed for each council district authorized to review and resolve account disputes for residential and commercial customers
- Authority includes the ability to review decisions made by the City Council’s third-party bill dispute administrator if an appeal is timely filed
- SWBNO continues to work with State and local officials to stand up the program



# Legislative Updates

2024 Regular Session

## Drainage Consolidation ([Act 763](#))

- Pending Cooperative Endeavor Agreement being reviewed by City of New Orleans and SWBNO
- Funding includes special \$5 million annual allocation from the Infrastructure Maintenance Fund (IMF)
- Per [Act 103](#), funding also includes revenue from traffic camera enforcement (\$TBD)

# HGI & SWBNO Collaboration

## **Third-Party Bill Dispute Administrator (HGI)**

- Appointed by City Council in September 2024

**Daily Coordination:** Ongoing exchange between HGI and SWBNO to input adjustments and ensure accuracy.

**Decisions Rendered:** A total of **2,825 decisions** made between September and October.

- Total Credit given:** \$7,305,442.90
- No Credit:** 57 decisions resulted in no credit.
- Credits under \$100:** 165 decisions below \$100.
- Credits over \$10,000:** 126 decisions exceeding \$10,000.
- Average Credit Amount:** \$2,639 per case. (around 2,500)
- Median Credit Amount:** \$806.84

## **Arbitration Requests:**

- September:** 15 accounts from SWBNO requested arbitration.
- October:** Arbitration status pending.

# Smart Meter Collections Overview

Row Labels ▾	Sum of Amount Due	Sum of Outstanding Amount	
+ Apr	\$ 89,260.12	\$ 19,357.99	
+ May	\$ 2,950,997.79	\$ 726,943.83	
+ Jul	\$ 5,361,677.24	\$ 1,215,887.16	PAST DUE
+ Aug	\$ 7,845,693.09	\$ 1,988,845.88	\$6,112,498.36
+ Sep	\$ 6,830,103.95	\$ 2,161,463.50	18%
+ Oct	\$ 11,480,434.80	\$ 6,109,315.60	
Grand Total	\$ 34,558,166.99	\$ 12,221,813.96	

- Delinquency Insights:**

- 80%+ of delinquencies** are from customers who were already delinquent prior to the smart meter installation and continue to be delinquent.
- The remaining delinquencies stem from **new customers** whose service is exclusively with the smart meter.

# Smart Meter Delinquency Management

- **Collection Process:**

- **The Collections Department** tracks delinquency by route.
- **The S route** specifically indicates customers with smart meters.
- **A 30-day delinquency letter** will be issued to customers 30 days past due followed by a disconnection letter and service order for disconnection between day 60-70.

***\* Shared file exchange between Collections and Meter Reading will establish the prioritization of disconnection of Smart Meters.***



**Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement | Executive Lead: Susannah Kirby**

*Continuously meet and exceed the service needs of our customers and proactively communicate and engage stakeholders*

2024 GOALS	ISSUES	TACTICS TO ADDRESS ISSUES	EXPECTED COMPLETION
<b>Elevate customer service delivery</b>	Some customer service policies, regulations, and processes have not been reviewed in recent years, creating the risk that they do not align with current customer service best practices.	Review, prioritize, and update policies, rules and regulations, and other mechanisms to ensure SWBNO's policies align with best practices, ultimately enhancing the customer's experience.	Q4 2024
	There is no comprehensive, formal training program for customer service personnel, which creates the risks that some employees have gaps in their skills or knowledge that may impact their ability to serve customers effectively.	Develop and facilitate training sessions for all customer service personnel.	Q4 2024
	Current organizational structure needs to be updated to reflect best management practices and effectively provide the required level of service for an organization of SWBNO's size.	Create and fill new management positions to improve organizational structure.	Q4 2024
<b>Enhance internal customer service culture</b>	Customers often interact with staff across multiple divisions. This can create a lack of accountability among staff, because no single work group or division is responsible for the customer experience.	Develop and implement a "Customer Experience" training for non-Customer Service staff to improve the overall customer journey and improve consistency in the public's interactions with the utility.	Q1 2025

# **Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans**

## **The People Plan**

### **Operations Committee Presentation**



**November 2024**





# Project Overview

- The People Plan is a study that seeks to determine the **best workforce policies, model, and practices** for the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans (SWBNO).
- SWBNO's workforce is its greatest asset. Approximately 1,300 employees work to provide essential water, wastewater, and drainage services.
- Perspectives and insights from **SWBNO employees are the driving force** of the People Plan.
  - During the multi-year project, focus group sessions, surveys, and other outreach and engagement activities seek to ensure that any proposals or recommendations align with and are **supported by SWBNO employees**.
- The People Plan is financially supported by the Greater New Orleans Foundation. The foundation engaged with PFM Consulting Group LLC and The Caulfield Consulting Group to conduct the study.



# People Plan Focus Areas

The People Plan focuses on the following key areas:

- Recruitment
- Retention
- Career Development and Pathways
- Compensation
- Accountability Structures
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

# Focus Area Activities



## Recruitment

- Developing job descriptions and advertising positions
- Reviewing applications
- Administering pre-hiring testing
- Conducting interviews and background checks
- Maintaining applicant register
- Tracking and reporting vacancies



## Retention

- Conducting new employee orientation and onboarding
- Conducting employee engagement activities (e.g., annual surveys)
- Developing and implementing education and skills incentives



## Career Development

- Developing job classification structures and career pathways
- Creating testing and training courses, materials, and requirements
- Providing testing and training opportunities
- Implementing employee performance reviews and evaluations



## Compensation

- Developing position pay, pay scales, and salary increases
- Developing other pay enhancements
- Reviewing and providing cost of living adjustments
- Providing and administering health and retirement benefits
- Developing and implementing leave policies (e.g., annual, sick, family)



## Accountability Structures

- Developing and implementing an employee code of conduct
- Developing and implementing disciplinary policies and processes
- Developing and implementing grievance policies and processes
- Developing and implementing an appeals process



## Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

- Developing and implementing DEI programming and initiatives



# The People Plan Process

## Assess

- Assess and understand key characteristics of SWBNO's workforce policies, model and practices
- Identify challenges and opportunities for improvement
- Completed Q2 2024

## Research

- Research comparator utilities
- Review their policies, operations, and processes and evaluate potential solutions for SWBNO
- Completed Q3 2024

## Listen

- Discuss practices and lessons learned from other utilities with employees
- Seek perspectives and feedback from employees on addressing SWBNO challenges
- Completed Q4 2024

## Analyze

- Develop a **proposed** path forward
- Pending completion in Q4 2024

## Engage

- Conduct outreach and engagement activities to share proposed path forward with employees and gauge support
- Share progress and updates with stakeholders
- Pending completion in Q4 2024/Q1 2025



# Assess Workforce Model

- Developed understanding of key characteristics of SWBNO's workforce policies and practices
  - Documented the roles and responsibilities of SWBNO's Human Resources Department, the City's Civil Service Department, and the Civil Service Commission
- Determined employees' understanding of current policies, practices, and procedures and their effectiveness
  - Conducted focus group sessions (65 participants)
  - Conducted online survey (more than 370 responses)
  - Met regularly with a Steering Committee comprised of a cross-section of employees
- Identified challenges and opportunities for improvement
- Completed in Q2 2024



# Research Comparator Utilities\*

- Analyzed how other utilities manage:
  - Recruitment
  - Retention
  - Career Development and Pathways
  - Compensation
  - Accountability Structures
  - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Evaluated whether any practices used by comparator utilities could be adapted and used to improve SWBNO's operations and processes
- Completed in Q3 2024

*\* Comparator utilities include Fairfax Water, Northern Virginia; Houston Public Works, Houston, TX; JEA, Jacksonville, FL; Philadelphia Water, Philadelphia, PA; WaterOne, Johnson County, KS; and WSSC Water, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, MD*



# *Listen* to Employees

- Conducted second round of focus group sessions focused on solutions
  - Shared practices and lessons learned from other utilities
  - Sought employee feedback and perspectives
  - Asked employees to propose their own solutions and ideas to address current challenges
- Ensured diversity and representation from focus group participants
  - Conducted eight (8) focus groups sessions with in-person and virtual options
  - Sessions included more than 70 participants
  - Representation from more than 25 departments and divisions
- Completed in Q4 2024



# Analyze Employees' Perspectives

- Determine areas where employees **support** change
  - Identify employee-supported solutions to address current challenges
- Determine areas where employees **oppose** change
  - Retain current policies, procedures, and processes as desired by employees
- Develop a **proposed** path forward, supported employees' perspectives and SWBNO's executive leadership, that is specifically tailored to meet the needs of the utility and its workforce
- Pending completion in Q4 2024





# *Engage* with Employees and Stakeholders

- Conduct utility-wide outreach and engagement activities to share proposed path forward with employees and gauge support
- Provide updates on progress to SWBNO Board of Directors and other internal/external stakeholders
- Pending completion in Q4 2024/Q1 2025

# **Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans**

## **The People Plan**

**Any Questions?**



**November 2024**