

SUBSTITUTE

Public Hearing: YES ☐ NO ☒

Department: Executive Assistant - Chief Operating Office

SUBJECT:

Commission District(s): All Commission Districts

Approve award of a contract with The Urban League of Greater Atlanta for the establishment and operation of the DeKalb Water and Sewer Customer Advocate.

Information Contact: Zachary Williams, Chief Operating Officer

Phone Number: 404-371-2174

PURPOSE:

To award a contract to The Urban League of Greater Atlanta to address customer billing issues, address the safeguarding of vulnerable residents against imminent increases in water rates as contemplated in BOC Resolution 2025-1357, and establish an income-based affordability plan..

NEED/IMPACT:

(1) To address issues regarding payment protections for customers to include but not limited to: (a). Households with incomes at or below a specific percentage of the AMI or Federal Poverty Guidelines with children aged 0-18. (b) Households with incomes at or below a specific percentage of the AMI or Federal Poverty Guidelines, with individuals over 65; (c) Income eligible individuals with documented disabilities; and (d) Customers who receive SNAP, SSI or SSD benefits.

(2) To establish and implement an income-based affordability plan to include: (a) a cap on the water bills of eligible low-income residents based on a percentage of their income; and (b) a program and plan to address, reduce, and eliminate disputes and delinquent debt.

FISCAL IMPACT:

See Attachment A –This item addresses Phases 1 and 2 only. Funding to be provided by the Department of Watershed Management.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve award of a contract to The Urban League of Greater Atlanta for (1) Phases 1 and 2 of the establishment and operation of the DeKalb County Water and Sewer Customer Advocate and (2) establishment and operation of the water and sewer customer assistance program authorize the CEO to execute all necessary documents in a from acceptable to the County Attorney.



Urban League of
Greater Atlanta



DeKalb County
GEORGIA

PROPOSAL

Establishment of the Office of Water and
Sewer Customer Advocacy for DeKalb
County (OWSCA-DC)

Urban League of Greater Atlanta (ULGA)

Initial Contract Period: July 1 – Dec. 31, 2025



History

The Urban League Movement

- **Founded in 1920**, the Atlanta Urban League is a civil rights organization focused on the economic advancement of African American and low to moderate income families and small businesses. **Atlanta Urban League** changed its name to the Urban League of Greater Atlanta in 2010. Since its inception, the ULGA has served more than 150,000 across metro Atlanta and the state of Georgia.
- The organization is an affiliate of the **National Urban League** headquartered in New York City. **The Urban League Movement** has grown to 92 affiliates in 36 states and the District of Columbia across the country led by Marc Morial, National President.
- Throughout its history, the **ULGA has served as an advocate and economic first responder** for working families and has a history of collaborations with DeKalb County including emergency rent and mortgage assistance, small business technical assistance, disaster assistance, workforce and youth development.



Marc Morial

NUL
President/CEO



Nancy Flake Johnson

ULGA
President/CEO





Background & Purpose

- DeKalb County Resolution 2024-1357 authorizes OWSCA (effective Aug 1, 2025) to protect vulnerable residents from rising water rates. Resolution 2025-1357 addresses the safeguarding of vulnerable residents against imminent increases in water rates. The resolution includes: 1) prohibition of water shutoffs for low-income and vulnerable households; 2) implementation of an income-based water affordability program.
- **Key focus areas:**
 - Creation and operation of an Income-based water and sewer discounted rate plan
 - Creation and operation of an Amnesty Program for long standing past-due bills
 - Resolving long standing Customer Dispute Cases
 - Connect Customers with aging infrastructure to repair resources as eligible
 - Connecting Customers to DeKalb workforce and other resources



Key Provisions

DeKalb County Resolution 2024-1357 authorizes OWSCA

- Applies to low-income households with children, older adults, people with disabilities, and SSI/SSD recipients
- Verifiable documentation required for eligibility
- Caps water bills based on income percentage
- Funded through water/sewer revenues
- Includes an Amnesty Program to reduce disputes and debts
- Partner with DC to develop a sustainability plan to address long-term solutions





Program Design Principles

Provides:

- Alignment with county resolution and strategies
- Holistic: debt relief, efficiency, fair rates
- Customer-centric: simple, accessible processes
- Fair & transparent resolution options
- Integrated technology for real-time communication
- Consistent public communication campaigns
- Accountability via feedback and continuous improvement



Phase 1

Planning/Development & Highlights

(July – December 2025)

- Advisory Group meetings with county & advocates
- Set up financial management and operational systems
- Research existing water discount and amnesty programs and adopt best practices
- Data collection and review
- Develop web portal, case management and data tracking systems
- Develop Low-Income Discount Rate Program
- Develop Amnesty Program
- Develop Disputes Resolution Program
- Create Data management , testing& evaluation systems
- Collect real-time feedback for improvements
- Regular advisory council meeting sand updates



Phase 2

Launch Pilot & Initiate Operations

(August – December 2025)

- Establish and launch communications platforms and technology: website, telephone & email portal for public engagement by August 1, 2025
- Recruit, screen, interview, hire and train staff
- Launch pilot serving early applicants and emergencies
- Stakeholder outreach for equity and inclusion including townhalls
- Identify and secure office location and set up
- Test and evaluate process flows and customer service tools.
- Collect real-time feedback for improvements
- Regular advisory council meetings and updates



Phase 1 & 2

Fee Quote

Fee Category	
Phase I Development Team Costs	\$ 291,404
Phase I Administrative & Other Project Costs	\$ 101,000
Total Phase I Costs	\$ 392,404
Phase II Operational Team Costs	\$ 558,033
Phase I Operational & Administrative Costs	\$ 140,000
Total Phase II Costs	\$ 698,033
Total Direct Project Costs	\$1,090,437
Indirect Costs@ 15%	\$ 163,611
Total Fee Quote - Phases I & II	\$1,254,048



Phase 3

Full Implementation and Operational Phase

January 2, 2026 – December 2026

Fee Quote: TBD during Phases I & II – **Not included
in this quote**

Full Program Launch Aims:

- Ensure affordable water access
- Create consistent, transparent and responsive communications and conflict resolution systems
- Reduce long term delinquent debt and unpaid balances
- Resolve high priority dispute cases
- Connect residents to economic mobility and supportive services to foster long term stability and enhanced quality of life
- Build public trust in water services system



Conclusion & Contact Information

ULGA's Approach:

- Access to affordable, uninterrupted water service for vulnerable residents
- Transparent, customer friendly, fair program operations
- Reduce delinquency backlog via amnesty
- Sustainable and community-focused water assistance

Nancy A. Flake Johnson

President/CEO

Urban League of Greater Atlanta

230 Peachtree St., NW – Suite 2600, Atlanta, GA 30303

404-931-6205 | njohnson@ulgatl.org

