# Detroit Water Restoration Task Force

# For Community and Governmental Strategic

# Planning and Oversight

## I. Purpose:

In Detroit, Michigan residential water and sanitation services since 2013 have been terminated because of non-affordability in thousands of homes. Presently Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) officials state that an "unknown" number of Michigan residents live in homes without water services.

The termination of over one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) homes in Detroit since 2013, a city with a large number of impoverished residents, has affected the most vulnerable populations of the city including people with disabilities, senior citizens, children and communities of color. Despite Detroit water assistance programs established since 2014, water service terminations have continued unabated. A Freedom of Information Act request by Joel Kurth from Bridge Magazine, obtained records from DWSD which "indicated that 9,500 occupied homes disconnected for non-payment in 2019 still were without service in mid-January [2020] while the average duration of disconnections for homes with restored service was twenty-nine [29] days."

In the face of the worldwide Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic now sweeping across the United States, on March 9, 2020, Governor Gretchen Whitmer and Mayor Michael Duggan announced a "Coronavirus COVID-19 Water Restart Plan." The plan included a halt to all City of Detroit water shut-offs and the restoration of water and sanitation to all City of Detroit occupied residential homes. The Governor and Mayor recognize the need for all citizens to have access to clean and healthy water. Having water in Detroit homes is required to follow the CDC guidelines for handwashing and other sanitation needs.

Further, the Governor and Mayor's "Coronavirus COVID-19 Water Restart Plan" requires the terminated customers to self-report by making contact with the Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency, then scheduling an appointment, in order to be in the plan. This has created an unnecessary roadblock and delay in service restoration where DWSD and its contractor know which occupied homes remain unrestored. Restoration of water service is primarily the responsibility of the City of Detroit and DWSD, while customers are encouraged to continue self-reporting as needed.

On March 29, 2020, Governor Whitmer signed an Executive Order stopping all service terminations and requiring the restoration of water and sanitation services to all occupied Michigan residential homes. The Governor's March 29th, 2020 Executive

Order restoring water statewide creates the possibility to utilize the Detroit Water Restoration Task Force template for other similarly situated cities and communities.

## II. Goals:

This proposal for the creation of the Detroit Water Restoration Task Force recognizes the immediate urgency of the public health crisis created by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, with a disproportionate rate of Detroit residents diagnosed with the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The goals of the Detroit Water Restoration Task Force include but are not limited to the following:

- To determine how many City of Detroit residential homes require restoration of water and sanitation services. The Task Force will review data retained by Homrich Wrecking, Inc, which is a City of Detroit Contractor and City of Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. DWSD gathered data through the Freedom of Information Act and submitted it to Bridge magazine, which should be made available to the Task Force for review.
- To define the scope of the Detroit water and restoration work both numerically and demographically.
- To perform a needs assessment for each individual household restoration.
- To provide sufficient water for each household prior to the restoration being completed.
- To structure the work in as expedited manner, while performing the restoration of services that produce safe water; including infrastructure, pipes, filters, and instructions on flushing.
- A website should be promptly created to assist with transparency for Detroit citizens including but not limited to the date(s) of water and sanitation termination(s) and the date(s) of water and sanitation restoration. Household data should include an itemized summary of infrastructure repair work required and completed for each address through a privacy-protected mechanism.
- To adopt a “Detroit Water Service - No Shut Off Policy” with an implementation of a “Detroit Water Affordability Plan.” This policy can be utilized state-wide for the public health and safety of all Michigan residents, where future pandemics from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and others are predictable and foreseeable.
- To confirm that all materials, including those used to combat the Coronavirus (COVID-19) will be disposed of safely and legally, utilizing Environmental Justice principles.

## III. Timeline:

An urgent response by Governor Whitmer is requested by April 10, 2020.

## IV. Members:

The Governor shall appoint members of the Detroit Water Restoration Task Force, after recommendations from Detroit community members; and governmental entities shall select their candidates in the following categories:

- Detroit community representatives involved in water affordability work.
- Governor's representative. The Detroit Water Restoration Task Force will have a liaison relationship with the Governor's Michigan Advisory Committee on Environmental Justice, including recognized community representatives and experts in various fields.
- Mayor's representatives from DWSD and the Detroit Health Department.
- State Legislative representative.
- Detroit City Council representative.
- Experts including but are not limited to the fields of: plumbing, water quality, structural engineering, public health, medicine including psychiatry and psychology, and law.
- The Detroit Water Restoration Task Force should not exceed 15 members.

## V. Other considerations on substantive work:

- Budget
- Information technology support.
- Environmental Justice, in all aspects of the Detroit Water Restoration Task Force work.
- Final Detroit Water Restoration Task Force White Paper created for Community and Governmental circulation in multiple languages.