



GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

AGENDA DATE: October 9, 2024

AGENDA ITEM: Review and discuss the status of the GRPU Wastewater Certified Lab

PREPARED BY: Steve Mattson, Water Wastewater Manager

BACKGROUND:

With the Wastewater Operations Director position currently vacant, we have temporarily outsourced the certified lab tests that were previously conducted in-house. Below is a summary of the current situation, a cost-benefit analysis, and proposed future actions.

Current Situation

GRPU is one of 100 major wastewater facilities in Minnesota and one of only 40 that operate a certified wastewater lab. The responsibility for managing this lab falls under the Wastewater Operations Director, a position currently vacant. Despite efforts, we have not yet identified a candidate who meets the qualifications for this role. During this vacancy, we made the decision to send certified lab tests to an external lab, a process that has gone smoothly. Staff have been able to manage monthly reporting requirements in a timely manner.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

We recently reviewed the costs of maintaining an internal certified lab versus outsourcing. The findings are as follows:

- Cost of internal testing: \$48,800 annually (including MPCA fees, certification tests, lab supplies, and labor).
- Cost of outsourcing: \$34,100 annually.
- Annual savings: \$14,700.

While we generally prefer to keep operations in-house, outsourcing would result in cost savings without impacting our regulatory compliance or reporting efficiency.

Future Steps

We propose developing a modified position description that allows for progressively increasing license qualifications, making internal candidates eligible for promotion into the role. By reallocating the time saved from certified lab duties, staff can focus on other critical projects within the department. If needed, GRPU can choose to re-certify the internal lab at any time in the future.

RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the cost analysis and operational benefits, we recommend outsourcing the certified lab work.