Legislation Details (With Text)

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On agenda:	11/3/2025	**Final action:**	11/5/2025
Title:	To authorize the Director of the Department of Public Utilities to enter into Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program agreements with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Arc of Appalachia, and the Appalachia Ohio Alliance; to execute those documents necessary to enter into these sponsorship agreements; and to declare an emergency. ($0.00)		
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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
11/5/2025	1	CITY CLERK	Attest	
11/4/2025	1	MAYOR	Signed	
11/3/2025	1	COUNCIL PRESIDENT	Signed	
11/3/2025	1	Columbus City Council	Approved	Pass

1. BACKGROUND

This ordinance authorizes the Director of Public Utilities to enter into a Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP) Agreement with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources for their White's Gulch project, with the Arc of Appalachia for their Hickory Hollows and Picket Run projects, and with the Appalachia Ohio Alliance for their Poston Farm 2 Addition - Alum Creek Conservation Corridor project, and to execute those documents necessary to enter into these sponsorship agreements.

The State of Ohio created the Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) to provide financial assistance for water resource protection and improvement actions. This program is jointly administered by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) and the Ohio Water Development Authority (OWDA). The Department of Public Utilities (DPU), with City Council approval, uses the WPCLF to fund many of its sanitary and storm water projects. The OEPA created the WRRSP within the WPCLF for the effective perpetual protection and maintenance of Ohio's high-quality aquatic ecosystem resources. An applicant applying to the WPCLF for financing of a water quality improvement project may also sponsor a qualifying WRRSP project or projects to be undertaken by itself or by an entity with the ability to implement the WRRSP project. The WRRSP program works by providing funds, through WPCLF loans, to finance the implementation of projects that protect or restore water resources. As loans are repaid to the WPCLF, the repayment goes primarily towards outstanding debt service and other bond obligations as well as returning money to the fund for future loan awards. A very small portion of this loan repayment is designated for use on WRRSP projects. There is no cost to a sponsoring organization such as DPU to sponsor a WRRSP project, and the sponsoring organization receives a reduction in the interest rate charged on their sponsoring WPCLF loan.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources White's Gulch project protects 164 acres of high-quality wetlands and headwater streams, rare species, and mature forest in Jackson County a few miles west of the town of Jackson near the Lake Katharine State Nature Preserve. This new preserve will be dedicated as a Scientific State Nature Preserve, thereby offering it the highest possible degree of environmental protection by the State. Specifically, this project will immediately maintain/improve water quality of the sub-watershed, plus aid in improving water quality for Pigeon Creek

and Salt Lick Creek. The site protects 8 wetlands, important forest interior for breeding bird habitat, 23 rare species, and high-quality plant communities. The site has beautiful mature forests, numerous sandstone outcrops, cliffs and rock shelters, and caves. This project's goal is to provide a framework of managing this site into the future - focusing on water resources and rare species. The project cost is paid by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources with WRRSP funds. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources will also administer this project.

The Arc of Appalachia Hickory Hollows project protects approximately 85 acres of habitat within the Paint Creek Watershed in Highland County near Paint Creek State Park. The proposed project will protect 2,830 linear feet of Hickory Hills Lake shoreline and 2,719 linear feet of primary headwater habitat within the Paint Creek watershed. The Rocky Fork Creek and Heads Branch, to which the headwater streams feed, are designated as exceptional warm water habitat. Hickory Hollows shelters one of the oldest and largest forests in the Highlands Nature Sanctuary region. Fully mature pignuts, shagbarks, and bitternuts abound, alongside towering white and red oaks. The property has very few invasive plants. The forest has an unusually dense spring wildflower display in its understory, and supports a great diversity of wildlife. The project cost will be paid by the Arc of Appalachia with WRRSP funds. The Arc of Appalachia will also administer this project.

The Arc of Appalachia Pickett Run Wetlands project protects approximately 19 acres within the Sad Song Region of the Highlands Nature Sanctuary in Highland County, Ohio, near Paint Creek State Park. It will provide the first conservation protection of Pickett Run, a significant tributary of the Rocky Fork, as well as protection for two unnamed streams and a stretch along the mainstem of Rocky Fork Creek. It will also protect and restore nearly 3 acres of historic and existing wetlands through the removal of invasive plant species and trash, demolition and clean-up of an abandoned house site, earthwork to redirect and retain surface water into wetland areas, and plantings to supplement wetland species in the floodplain. The Arc of Appalachia will also administer this project.

The Appalachia Ohio Alliance Poston Farm 2 Addition - Alum Creek Conservation Corridor project protects the upper reaches of the Alum Creek watershed in Morrow County. This is the second phase of this project (221 acres of adjoining property was purchased in 2024), which involves the purchase and permanent protection of 178 acres of land along Alum Creek. The project will protect 17,275 feet of stream corridor, including 3,700 feet of Alum Creek mainstem and 2,900 feet of the West Branch of Alum Creek. The project will also protect floodplain wetland, deciduous hardwood forest and habitat for multiple state-listed rare species. In addition to the property purchase, this project also includes pollinator habitat and tree planting, access gate construction, and invasive species removal. The Appalachia Ohio Alliance will also administer this project.

The WPCLF loan financed project DPU proposes to use for these sponsorships is the Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Lateral Lining Project 2, CIP # 650872-153002. Bids for this project opened 8/27/25. An ordinance requesting City Council's approval to award the contract and expend funds for construction is expected to be on City Council's 11/3/25 and 11/17/25 agendas. The loan for Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Lateral Lining Project 2 is expected to be approved at the OWDA December Board meeting. DPU will need to provide OEPA a letter of intent to sponsor all of these projects and execute sponsorship agreements with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Arc of Appalachia, and Appalachia Ohio Alliance for the projects. DPU staff will review invoices the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Arc of Appalachia, and Appalachia Ohio Alliance submit for payment for these projects to ensure they are for project qualifying expenses. The approved invoices are then sent to OEPA for review before being submitted to OWDA for payment.

The WRRSP funding generated by the WPCLF loan to DPU for Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Lateral Lining Project 2 will completely fund the project cost of three of the four projects proposed to be sponsored by this ordinance. The Appalachia Ohio Alliance Poston Farm 2 Addition - Alum Creek Conservation Corridor project (Poston Farm) will be partially funded due to the much larger cost of this project. DPU plans to seek City Council's approval to use a future DPU project funded by a WPCLF loan to sponsor the remaining Poston Farm project cost if another organization does not offer to sponsor the remaining Poston Farm project cost.

2. FISCAL IMPACT

There is no cost to the City or to the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) to sponsor the White's Gulch, Hickory

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Hollows, Picket Run, and Poston Farm projects. DPU expects to receive a 0.10 interest rate discount on the 20-year loan that will fund the construction cost of the Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Project, CIP # 650872-153002, for sponsoring these projects.

3. EMERGENCY DESIGNATION

Emergency designation is requested as this ordinance must be effective the week of 11/3/25 so the sponsorship documents can be executed in time to allow processing prior to the Ohio Water Development Authority's December Board meeting, which is when the loan for Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Lateral Lining Project 2 is expected to be approved, so the Department of Public Utilities will receive the interest rate discount for the 20-year loan for this project.

To authorize the Director of the Department of Public Utilities to enter into Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program agreements with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Arc of Appalachia, and the Appalachia Ohio Alliance; to execute those documents necessary to enter into these sponsorship agreements; and to declare an emergency. ($0.00)

WHEREAS, the Department of Public Utilities seeks to construct Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Lateral Lining Project 2, CIP # 650872-153002; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Public Utilities intends to apply for Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) funding for the construction of Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Lateral Lining Project 2, CIP # 650872-153002; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Public Utilities and the City of Columbus Council recognizes the importance of, and supports the conservation and enhancement of, natural resources that will be protected through the Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP) projects; and

WHEREAS, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources has proposed acquiring and protecting valuable water resources through their White’s Gulf WRRSP Project; and

WHEREAS, the Arc of Appalachia has proposed acquiring and protecting valuable water resources through their Hickory Hollows and Pickett Run Wetlands WRRSP Projects; and

WHEREAS, the Appalachia Ohio Alliance has proposed acquiring and protecting valuable water resources through their Poston Farm 2 Addition - Alum Creek Conservation Corridor WRRSP Project; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Public Utilities intends to participate in the WRRSP in association with the WPCLF to assist the Ohio Department of Natural Resources for their White’s Gulch Project, as well as Arc of Appalachia for their Hickory Hollows and Picket Run projects, and Appalachia Ohio Alliance for their Poston Farm 2 Addition - Alum Creek Conservation Corridor project; and

WHEREAS, an emergency exists in the usual daily operation of the Department of Public Utilities in that this ordinance must be effective no later than the week of 11/3/25 so the sponsorship documents can be executed in time to allow processing prior to the Ohio Water Development Authority's December Board meeting, which is when the loan for Blueprint - Hilltop 1 - Palmeto/Westgate Lateral Lining Project 2 is expected to be approved, so the Department of Public Utilities will receive the interest rate discount for that 20-year loan, thereby preserving the public health, peace, property, safety, and welfare; **NOW, THEREFORE,**

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS:

SECTION 1. That City Council authorizes the Director of the Department of Public Utilities to participate in the Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program in association with the Water Pollution Control Loan Fund for the White’s Gulch, Hickory Hollows, Picket Run, and Poston Farm 2 Addition - Alum Creek Conservation Corridor projects, and to execute those documents needed to participate in the sponsorship program for these projects.

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SECTION 2. This City of Columbus Council hereby finds and determines that all formal actions relative to the passage of this resolution were taken in an open meeting of this Council, and that all deliberations of this Council and of its committees, if any, which resulted in formal action, were taken in meetings open to the public, in full compliance with applicable legal requirements, including Section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

SECTION 3. That for the reasons stated in the preamble hereto, which is made a part hereof, this Ordinance is declared to be an emergency measure and shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage and approval by the Mayor, or ten (10) days after passage if the Mayor neither approves nor vetoes this Ordinance.

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