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To: Mayor & Commission  
From: Gavin J. Hassemer, Internal Auditor  
Date: October 3, 2025  
Subject: Water Business Office Periodic Audit Follow-Up

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In February of 2020 the Office of Operational Analysis completed an audit report of the Public Utilities Department (PUD), Water Business Office (WBO) division. As part of the FY26 workplan, both the Operational Analysis (OA) Office and Audit Committee believed it to be important that a formal follow-up take place, regardless of who performed the audit and the duration between initial report and reinspection.

The original report included eight findings with eleven accompanying recommendations for the department director and division administrator to consider. Over the last five years, both of these positions have changed personnel. Furthermore, the completion of the audit occurred just prior to the federal state of emergency declaration in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

With the cooperation of the Public Utilities Department, our office has conducted a review of the status of the recommendations made in the 2020 audit.

The objectives of this review were:

1. To assess the status of the findings discovered during the audit
2. To gauge the status of implementation of recommendations
3. To gather and report on pertinent information regarding changes to the office which might impact the findings and conclusions of the audit report

This follow-up investigation included written correspondence, an in-person meeting, and a field visit by OA staff. Our review has no formal opinions or conclusions, but is performed to ensure mutual understanding among all parties regarding the audit and operational analysis processes. You will find the results in the attached document, "Follow-Up Review of the Audit of the Athens-Clarke County Water Business Office, 2020."

In addition to the contents of the attached document, the Operational Analysis Office wishes to recognize the transparency and thoroughness with which the Public Utilities Department helped develop this follow-up report. The Water Business Office Administrator and staff have demonstrated the value of internal auditing as a tool for continuous improvement and accountability.

Please direct any questions or concerns regarding this report to the Athens-Clarke County Internal Auditor. The Internal Auditor wishes to thank the Public Utilities Department Director and staff for their cooperation with this initiative.

Finding #1	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of July 2025, Per Department
No formal policies or procedures are in place at the WBO.	Partially Agree	<i>Implementation In Progress</i>
Recommendation #1	Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)	<p><b>Department's Update (2025)</b></p> <p>The independent consultant should finalize the Operating Policies and Procedures and the Water Business Office should implement them within the next 12 months.</p> <p>The Public Utilities Department partially agrees with this finding. There are numerous existing Policy/Procedures (P&amp;P) in place in the Water Business Office (WBO). The Audit Report acknowledges same on page #5 of the report. The existing P&amp;P notebook on file in the WBO was developed entirely by PUD staff. In addition, there are several sections of Municipal Code that dictate how certain things are handled in the WBO. The new Business Plan includes the implementation of numerous new processes, checks and balances and P&amp;P. There was a question noted in the Audit Report regarding the decision to use an outside firm to assist with the development of the new Business Plan; much insight was gained from new and fresh ideas the professionals brought to the table. In addition the knowledge and fresh ideas obtained by the professionals from working previously with multiple other municipalities and incorporating some of those ideas into our new Business Plan will pay dividends in the WBO for years to come. The PUD agrees the New Business Plan will be implemented within the next 12 months.</p> <p><i>The COVID-19 Pandemic:</i> The pandemic necessitated significant changes to operational practices, including remote work arrangements, contactless customer service, and an increased reliance on digital platforms. These rapid changes required flexible interpretation and adaptation of procedures, many of which were originally designed for traditional in-office workflows. As a result, previously established policies must now be revisited and revised to meet post-pandemic service delivery expectations.</p> <p><i>Major Leadership Transition in 2024:</i> In 2024, the Water Business Office experienced the simultaneous retirement of several key long-standing personnel:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The Water Business Administrator, after 40 years of service</li> <li>-The Operations Coordinator, after 38 years of service</li> <li>-The Customer Service Supervisor</li> <li>-The Field Services Supervisor</li> </ul> These departures marked a major shift in institutional knowledge and practice. In early 2025, new leadership was established with the appointment of a new Water Business Administrator, who has prioritized a full-scale review and modernization of all WBO policies and procedures to ensure they align with current operational realities and best practices.</p> <p><i>This transition in WBO Leadership followed broader leadership changes within the Public Utilities Department. Hollis Terry was named Director of Public Utilities in March 2020, and Hugh Ogle was selected as the Assistant Director in May 2020. At the time the initial audit was conducted, both Hollis and Hugh were serving as Superintendents, giving them valuable insight into WBO operations and longstanding practices.</i></p> <p><i>With over 25 years of experience in the environmental protection field, Hollis brings a deep understanding of regulatory frameworks, organizational efficiency, and customer service needs. It has taken time for the new leadership team to fully acclimate to their roles, assess inherited processes, and make informed decisions based on their collective experience, industry knowledge, and forward-looking goals.</i></p> <p><i>To support this effort, the WBO engaged an independent consultant who is also assisting with the implementation of a new utility billing software platform. This partnership is ensuring that procedural updates are aligned not only with evolving business needs but also with the capabilities and workflows of the incoming system. This alignment is critical to ensure that new policies support operational efficiency, customer service excellence, and long-term sustainability.</i></p> <p><i>The consultant brings valuable insight based on industry-wide best practices and experience with similar transitions in other municipalities. Their expertise has been instrumental in helping the WBO design policies that are forward-looking, practical, and rooted in sound internal controls.</i></p> <p><i>As part of the broader modernization effort, the Water Business Office is also undergoing a major utility billing software upgrade, which is a key driver for the revision of policies and procedures. As of July 2025, the upgrade is approximately 35% complete, with the team currently working to complete the initial data conversion—a critical phase that ensures accuracy and integrity of customer, meter, and billing data as it transitions into the new system. This step involves extensive validation and collaboration between internal staff and the software vendor to identify and resolve any data inconsistencies. Once data conversion is finalized, the project will progress into system configuration, user training, and testing phases, with full implementation anticipated by mid-2026.</i></p> <p><i>Importantly, the WBO recognizes that policies and procedures must be living documents—regularly reviewed and refined as conditions, technologies, and customer needs evolve. For this reason, the WBO is intentionally taking the time necessary to ensure that the updated P&amp;P Manual is not only complete, but also thoughtfully structured to support both the current environment and future growth, particularly in alignment with the forthcoming billing system.</i></p>

Finding #2	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of July 2025, Per Department
WBO software is outdated.	Partially Agree	Implementation In Progress
Recommendation #2	Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)	Department's Update (2025)
Update or replace the software to interact with the financial software used throughout ACC.	<p>PUD agrees with this finding; however, there appears to be confusion in the Audit Report regarding Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Billing Software. ERP is not the same as Billing Software. PUD will initiate a Request for Proposals (RFP) thru the ACC Finance Department and Information Technology Dept. requesting a proposal for the provision and implementation of a new Billing Software. It should be noted staff recognized the need to accomplish same prior to the audit initiation, but considered implementation of a new Billing Software before finalization of the AMI Project, review of the existing water and sewer rate structure and prior to the selection of the ERP by ACC would create major implementation problems, additional costs and project delays.</p>	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) agrees with the finding and has already taken significant steps to modernize the Water Business Office's software infrastructure. The legacy H.T.E./Naviline platform is no longer sufficient to meet the increasingly complex operational demands of the WBO and Solid Waste. As such, we are currently implementing SpryPoint, a modern, cloud-based utility billing solution tailored specifically for public utilities.</i></p> <p><b>Current Status:</b> <i>Implementation is approximately 35% complete. We are currently in the data conversion phase, focusing on migrating customer account, billing, and usage history from the H.T.E. system. Training will be conducted during the User Acceptance Testing (UAT) phase, which is scheduled to begin once data validation and system configuration are finalized.</i></p> <p><b>Why Tyler Munis was not selected:</b> <i>Although Tyler Munis is widely used across ACC for general financial operations, it is not designed to support the complex billing and customer service functions required by WBO and Solid Waste. Specifically:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>-Munis lacks robust support for consumption-based billing and tiered rate structures.</i></li> <li><i>-It does not provide real-time AMI integration, which is critical for usage monitoring and leak detection.</i></li> <li><i>-Substantial custom development would be required to accommodate routine functions such as leak adjustments, seasonal rate applications, and service orders.</i></li> <li><i>-Reporting capabilities are not utility-specific, limiting operational insight without expensive add-ons or in-house customization.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Why SpryPoint was selected:</b> <i>SpryPoint is purpose-built for utilities and aligns with the needs of WBO and its partner divisions. Its advantages include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>-Full support for multi-service billing (water, sewer, stormwater, and solid waste), including complex billing scenarios like UGA cooling tower adjustments and stormwater tiering.</i></li> <li><i>-Seamless integration with AMI, allowing for real-time usage tracking, proactive alerts, and enhanced customer communication.</i></li> <li><i>-Cloud-based architecture that minimizes IT overhead and dependency on legacy systems.</i></li> <li><i>-Modern self-service customer portal and mobile access that reduce workload for staff while improving customer experience.</i></li> <li><i>-Built-in compliance features to support regulations such as the Disposition of Unclaimed Property Act (O.C.G.A. § 44-12-190).</i></li> <li><i>-Proven success in municipalities with similar needs and organizational structures.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing and Operational Support:</b> <i>To support this transition and future operational goals, In January 2025, PUD hired a new Water Business Office Administrator was hired with 23 years of experience in, financial management. Her background includes managing complex financial systems, and implementing process improvements. She has presented at national water finance conferences and is actively involved in state-level utility professional associations. Under her leadership, the WBO is aligning policies and procedures with best practices and preparing for a successful software implementation.</i></p> <p><i>Additionally, they hired an Operations Coordinator in May 2025. The selected candidate brings a strong data and analysis background, having previously worked as a high school statistics teacher and later in the department's Meter Management Division. This combination of analytical skill and operational familiarity positions them well to assist with system reporting, performance monitoring, and process improvements as we implement SpryPoint.</i></p>

Finding #2	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
WBO software is outdated.	Partially Agree	Implementation In Progress
Recommendation #3	Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)	Department's Update (2025)
Provide extensive training on all facets of the H.T.E. software or purchase the financial software used by other departments in ACC.	Staff partially agrees with this portion of the finding. Although extensive training has been made available previously, immediate efforts will be made to provide more additional and extensive training on all facets of HTE/Sungard. Per ACC Information Technology Dept. implementation of a new Billing Software will take approximately 24 months to implement once the billing software has been selected.	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) and Water Business Office (WBO) have taken decisive action to address this recommendation. Rather than continuing to invest in training for the legacy H.T.E. system, which is outdated and no longer aligned with our operational needs, we have opted to replace the system entirely.</i></p> <p><i>In partnership with the Solid Waste Department, the WBO has entered into a contract with SpryPoint, a modern, cloud-based utility billing platform designed specifically for the needs of water, sewer, stormwater, and solid waste operations. This strategic move eliminates the need for further investment in the H.T.E. system and ensures alignment with current best practices in utility billing and customer service</i></p> <p><i>We are currently in the data conversion phase of implementation and have completed approximately 35% of this process. This critical stage involves mapping and migrating data from H.T.E. into SpryPoint to ensure accuracy and integrity across customer accounts, billing history, and service data.</i></p> <p><i>Staff training will begin during the user acceptance testing (UAT) phase and will include extensive hands-on sessions to ensure a smooth transition and user proficiency across all roles. Training will be tailored to the specific needs of each functional area within the WBO to maximize effectiveness and system adoption.</i></p> <p><i>The new platform also supports integration with Tyler Munis, the financial software currently used by other ACC departments, which will allow for improved financial reporting, reconciliation, and cross-departmental data flow.</i></p> <p><i>By moving forward with SpryPoint, the Water Business Office is not only addressing the audit recommendation but also investing in a long-term solution that enhances operational efficiency, customer service, and financial accountability.</i></p>

Finding #2	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
WBO software is outdated.	Partially Agree	Implementation In Progress
<b>Recommendation #4</b>	<b>Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)</b>	<b>Department's Update (2025)</b>
Proactively pursue continuous improvement in technology, work practices, and processes to eliminate the heavy dependency on other ACC departments and the software vendor for technology support.	<p>PUD agrees with a portion of this finding. PUD proactively pursues continuous improvement in technology, work practices and processes to eliminate dependency on other ACC Depts. (Examples; Upgrading the AMI System to 5G before the project was completed, utilizing Cellular Meter Interface Units(CMIU) to eliminate trouble spot polling areas, implementation of the Customer Portal, which allows the customers to monitor and manage their water usage online, thereby enhancing customer service, and recognizing operational processes shortcomings and lack of consistency by developing a New Business Plan for the WBO.</p>	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) and Water Business Office (WBO) fully support this recommendation and are actively taking steps to enhance internal capacity and reduce reliance on other ACC departments and third-party vendors for technology support.</i></p> <p><i>The implementation of SpryPoint, a modern cloud-based utility billing software, is a key part of this strategy. SpryPoint is designed to be more intuitive and user-configurable than the legacy H.T.E. system, allowing WBO staff to manage billing rules, workflows, and reporting tools internally without needing constant vendor or IT intervention.</i></p> <p><i>To support this transition and strengthen in-house expertise:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>The WBO has expanded its leadership team, hiring an experienced Administrator and Operations Coordinator in early 2025. Both bring a strong background in utility operations, system implementation, data management, and customer service optimization.</i></li> <li><i>The department is also committed to ongoing staff training and cross-training, ensuring that employees at all levels are equipped to manage day-to-day operations, troubleshoot common issues, and adapt to new systems and procedures without external dependency.</i></li> <li><i>In collaboration with ACC IT and the SpryPoint implementation team, the WBO is documenting new standard operating procedures (SOPs) and creating internal knowledge resources to improve staff autonomy and consistency across functions.</i></li> <li><i>The WBO is working to automate routine workflows using existing Microsoft Office 365 tools (e.g., Power Automate, Forms, and SharePoint), which will streamline internal processes and reduce the burden on IT for custom development.</i></li> <li><i>In parallel, we continue to evaluate and implement digital tools for customer engagement, such as online forms, mobile-friendly platforms, and self-service portals—reducing the need for manual processing and improving overall efficiency.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>These efforts demonstrate the department's strong commitment to continuous improvement and long-term operational sustainability. By building in-house expertise, modernizing systems, and optimizing processes, the WBO is reducing dependency and positioning itself for scalable, technology-driven growth.</i></p>

Finding #2	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
WBO software is outdated.	Partially Agree	<i>Implementation Complete</i>
<b>Recommendation #5</b>	<b>Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)</b>	<b>Department's Update (2025)</b>
Hire a financial/operations manager proficient in up-to-date ERP software to generate utility reports, conduct financial analysis, communicate data across reporting levels within the WBO and with other ACC departments as necessary; support WBO operations, evaluate internal controls, and ensure the WBO becomes compliant with the Disposition of Unclaimed Property Act O.C.G.A. Section 44-12-190.	<p>The PUD agrees with this finding. The Mayor &amp; Commission approved a Financial Analyst position in the WBO, as recommended by the Manager. The job description has been developed, Human Resources is reviewing, and PUD will be advertising to fill the position within 4 weeks. PUD recognized the need for additional staff to communicate and share information with other departments and responded by funding an Informational Technology position. The New Business Plan includes the process relative to the disposition of unclaimed property and same will be initiated within twelve months when the new Business Plan is initiated.</p>	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) and Water Business Office (WBO) agree with this recommendation and have taken meaningful action to fulfill it.</i></p> <p><i>In February 2024, the department filled the Public Utilities Analyst position specifically designed to address the analytical and financial functions outlined in this recommendation. This role performs utility reporting, cross-departmental financial coordination, and supports internal controls, contributing significantly to the WBO's data-driven decision-making processes.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, in January 2025, the department hired a Water Business Office Administrator with 23 years of experience in financial management, utility billing, and operations. This role encompasses the responsibilities outlined in the recommendation, including:</i></p> <p><i>Expertise in ERP and billing software: The Administrator brings extensive experience managing and integrating complex financial systems, including utility billing platforms and enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. She is actively involved in the implementation of SpryPoint, a modern utility billing system with API integration to Tyler Munis, ACC's enterprise financial software.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>• Data analysis and reporting: She is responsible for generating and interpreting utility reports, conducting revenue forecasts, and delivering financial analyses used for budget planning, leak adjustments, and rate studies. These reports are shared with department leadership, the Water Adjustment Board, and other stakeholders.</i></li> <li><i>• Cross-departmental communication: The Administrator works closely with ACC's Finance Department, IT, Solid Waste and Stormwater Division to ensure coordinated data sharing and reporting. Her background in utility operations and finance supports effective communication across reporting levels within the WBO and with other ACC departments (include stormwater as they have been in on some of the development).</i></li> <li><i>• Internal controls and operational oversight: She has implemented new processes and policies to improve accuracy in billing, collections, and AMI data management. These include updated reconciliation procedures, budget monitoring tools, and review of key performance indicators to strengthen internal controls.</i></li> <li><i>• Compliance with the Disposition of Unclaimed Property Act (O.C.G.A. § 44-12-190): The WBO has initiated a review of unclaimed customer credits and is developing a process for handling dormant balances in accordance with state law. The Administrator is working with ACC Finance and Legal to ensure compliance with reporting and remittance requirements under the Act.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Together, the Public Utilities Analyst and Water Business Office Administrator provide the technical expertise, financial oversight, and operational leadership envisioned by this recommendation. The department will continue to monitor workload and system demands as the SpryPoint implementation progresses and may consider additional staffing support to ensure long-term compliance, transparency, and operational excellence.</i></p>

Finding #3	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
The customer billing process is time-consuming and inefficient.	Agree	<i>Implementation In Progress</i>
<b>Recommendation #6</b>	<b>Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)</b>	<b>Department's Update (2025)</b>
Implement an updated billing system improving the speed and efficiency of the billing process.	PUD agrees with this finding and will work with the ACC Finance Department and the Informational Technology Department to develop and advertise for Requests for Proposals (RFP) to facilitate the review and selection of a new Billing Software for the WBO.	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) and Water Business Office (WBO) fully agrees with this recommendation and have already taken significant steps toward implementation. In partnership with the Solid Waste Department, the WBO has entered into a contract with SpryPoint, a modern, cloud-based utility billing system specifically designed for water, sewer, stormwater, and solid waste services.</i></p> <p><i>SpryPoint is being implemented to replace the legacy H.T.E. system and will significantly improve the speed, accuracy, and efficiency of the billing process. Key benefits include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>• Faster billing cycles through automated workflows and improved system performance</i></li> <li><i>• Real-time data integration with Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) systems, reducing manual data entry and delays</i></li> <li><i>• Improved accuracy and transparency, reducing the risk of billing errors and adjustments</i></li> <li><i>• Streamlined reporting and reconciliation, with built-in tools for managing exceptions and reviewing account activity</i></li> <li><i>• Cloud-based infrastructure, enabling greater reliability, scalability, and system accessibility for staff</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The project is currently in the data conversion phase, with full implementation expected by June 2026, pending successful testing and migration. Staff training and process documentation are being developed concurrently to ensure a smooth transition and sustainable long-term operation.</i></p> <p><i>This system upgrade directly supports the audit's recommendation and represents a critical investment in the modernization of utility operations, customer service, and financial management for Athens-Clarke County.</i></p>

Finding #4	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
The implementation of the AMI technology is complete. Public Utilities completed the installation of the project in November 2019.	Agree	<i>Implementation In Progress</i>
Recommendation #7	Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)	Department's Update (2025)
Continue to enhance the AMI system to reduce misreads and the lack of polling by either the installation of additional collectors or by other means.	PUD agrees with this finding. Staff continues to seek technology advancement to the AMI System that will enhance customer service while also improving system performance. Staff is working with ACCGov Finance Department to advertise an RFP for a Financial Component that will complement the AMI Customer Portal. Features will include paperless billing, establishing or modifying an account online, online payment by e-check or credit card, etc. Staff is currently working with the AMI Software Company to move data management from a server to cloud based, resulting in data efficiencies and long term cost savings.	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) agrees with this recommendation and has taken direct action to improve the reliability and performance of the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Collector Upgrades: In response to gaps in data polling and instances of misreads, the department purchased and installed replacement collectors to address malfunctioning or underperforming units within the existing AMI network. These new cellular collectors have strengthened signal coverage and improved the consistency and accuracy of meter reads throughout the service area.</i></li> <li><i>Experienced Leadership: The Meter Management Division hired a new Superintendent who played a key role in the original implementation of the Neptune 360 AMI metering platform. Under his leadership, the division has prioritized proactive system monitoring, field diagnostics, and timely maintenance to ensure optimal AMI performance.</i></li> <li><i>Ongoing Monitoring and Alerts: The Water Business Office and Meter Management Division receive daily alerts from Neptune 360, including notifications of invalid readings, days of no flow, high consumption, and suspected meter tampering. These alerts allow for quick investigation and resolution, improving data quality and customer service.</i></li> <li><i>Planned Meter Replacement Program: The PUD has also initiated a meter change-out program to ensure long-term reading accuracy. Many of the current meters are now between 10 and 12 years old, and while the expected life cycle exceeds 20 years, the department is proactively planning for replacements to prevent accuracy degradation and maintain system reliability.</i></li> <li><i>Future Enhancements: The department continues to monitor AMI read success rates and identify areas where polling issues persist. Planned improvements may include further network adjustments, enhanced endpoint configurations, and integration with new billing tools such as SpryPoint to improve data flow and operational efficiency.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>These efforts have already resulted in improved accuracy of customer usage data, reduced the need for manual meter reads, and enabled quicker detection of leaks or anomalies. The PUD remains committed to maintaining and enhancing the AMI system as a core component of its utility operations strategy.</i></p>

Finding #5	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
Customer service procedures lack consistency.	Agree	<i>Implementation In Progress</i>
Recommendation #8	Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)	Department's Update (2025)
Establish standard customer procedures that all staff adhere to.	<p>Staff agrees with this finding. Prior to the initiation of the Internal Audit of the WBO, staff has already identified shortcomings and initiated the development of a new Business Plan for the WBO. One of the reasons for the Plan development was to memorialize the day to day operating procedures, thereby creating operational consistencies and processes to ensure staff is using the same metrics and standards. In addition, the new Plan implements a variety of checks and balances that will result in improved performance efficiencies across the WBO.</p>	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) agrees with this recommendation and is actively working to establish and implement standardized customer service procedures across the Water Business Office (WBO).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>In January 2025, a new Water Business Office Administrator was hired and tasked with leading a full review and update of all Water Business Office policies and procedures. This includes customer-facing procedures related to account setup and termination, billing inquiries, payment arrangements, leak adjustments, and disconnections.</i></li> <li><i>The WBO is currently collaborating with the consultant engaged for the implementation of the SpryPoint billing system to ensure all standard operating procedures (SOPs) are updated to align with modern utility practices and the functionality of the new system.</i></li> <li><i>While the updated procedures are being finalized, staff continue to operate under existing documented policies and relevant municipal ordinances, ensuring continuity and consistency in customer service.</i></li> <li><i>The department is also prioritizing staff training and cross-training to ensure all customer service representatives follow the same procedures and communicate information consistently to the public.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>On January 15, 2025, the Water Business Office closed for half of a day to allow the entire team to participate in a full-day training provided by the Georgia Association of Water Professionals (GAWP) focused on customer service in the water industry. This professional development opportunity emphasized best practices in handling customer interactions, service setup, and billing inquiries.</i></p> <p><i>Once finalized, the updated procedures will be documented in a centralized, accessible format and reinforced through regular training, internal audits, and performance evaluations to ensure full adherence by all staff.</i></p> <p><i>The WBO is committed to delivering clear, consistent, and equitable service to all customers by establishing and maintaining standardized procedures across all customer interactions.</i></p>

Finding #6	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
ACCUG departments are not afforded the opportunity to collaborate with the WBO staff to maximize customer service.	Partially Agree	<i>Implementation in Progress</i>
Recommendation #9	Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)	Department's Update (2025)
Empower the Solid Waste staff by training them on how to create accounts, take and post payments, and to assist during high levels of account activity.	PUD staff partially agrees with this finding. WBO staff has continued to collaborate with other departments to improve overall customer service. Examples are when PUD and T&PW Storm Water opened a joint office on the East side, closer to that customer base. While ultimately the volume of transactions did not warrant keeping the satellite office open, this is still an example of collaboration between the WBO and other depts. The WBO continues to work with Solid Waste and Information Technology to identify ways to improve customer service. Solid Waste has manned a station at the WBO during RUSH to provide information regarding available solid waste services. In addition a computer station was established in the lobby of the WBO allowing customers to sign in to the system rather than standing in a long line waiting their turn. Unfortunately available existing work stations limit utilizing Solid Waste staff assisting with taking payments, creating and posting to an account, etc. WBO staff will ensure that HTE training is made available to Solid Waste staff, so that the WBO can utilize their talents as the opportunities become available.	<p data-bbox="682 311 2063 360"><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) agrees with this recommendation and has taken intentional steps to enhance training and cross-functional support across utility divisions, including Solid Waste.</i></p> <ul data-bbox="682 388 2063 752" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="682 388 2063 437"><i>Since January 2025, the newly appointed Water Business Office Administrator has placed a strong emphasis on training, staff development, and operational readiness across all service areas.</i></li> <li data-bbox="682 465 2063 514"><i>Monthly all-staff meetings are now held to provide training, updates on policy or procedural changes, and to reinforce expectations around service consistency and collaboration.</i></li> <li data-bbox="682 541 2063 590"><i>The Administrator has also implemented "Lunch and Learn" sessions hosted in the WBO Training Room. These sessions are held at least once a month and are structured in hourly rotations during the lunch period to ensure coverage while allowing all staff—including Solid Waste team members—to participate. Topics have included customer service skills, system navigation, and account management practices.</i></li> <li data-bbox="682 618 2063 687"><i>On January 15, 2025, the Water Business Office closed for half of a day to allow the entire team to participate in a full-day training provided by the Georgia Association of Water Professionals (GAWP) focused on customer service in the water industry. This professional development opportunity emphasized best practices in handling customer interactions, service setup, and billing inquiries.</i></li> <li data-bbox="682 714 2063 752"><i>As part of the upcoming SpryPoint billing system implementation, additional joint training sessions will be scheduled to ensure Solid Waste and WBO staff are equipped to create accounts, post payments, and assist during peak periods such as student move-ins and billing cycles.</i></li> </ul>

Finding #7	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
Customer parking is inadequate.	Agree	<i>Implementation in Progress</i>
<b>Recommendation #10</b>	<b>Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)</b>	<b>Department's Update (2025)</b>
Controlled parking or additional parking spaces are needed for customers. A single entrance and separate exit both with gates would assist with parking issues.	<p>A. PUD agrees with this finding. Staff will work with the ACC T&amp;PW Traffic Engineer to request an evaluation of traffic flow patterns at the Customer Service Center (CSC), inclusive of striping and signage.</p> <p>B. PUD recommends designating the three existing parking spaces on Hancock Avenue in front of the CSC and the three spaces adjacent to the CSC on Lumpkin Street be designated for WBO Customer Parking only.</p> <p>C. PUD recommends implementation of the Customer Drive Thru Window that was included in the original building design</p> <p>D. PUD recommends the reallocation of an existing vacant Meter Reader position to a full-time police officer position to provide security for the CSC. Responsibilities will include monitoring all customer parking and traffic movement. Currently, the WBO utilizes off duty police officers during RUSH and peak volume periods.</p>	<p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) acknowledges the parking challenges at the Water Business Office (WBO) and shares the concern regarding accessibility for customers, particularly elderly and disabled individuals. However, the PUD does not have authority over parking availability, as all public parking in the downtown government complex is managed and governed by the Athens Downtown Parking Authority.</i></p> <p><i>Currently, the Water Business Office has access to only seven parking spaces adjacent to the building—three designated for handicapped parking and four for general use. This limited capacity has posed ongoing challenges for both customers and staff.</i></p> <p><i>It is important to note, however, that the Public Utilities Department (PUD) does not receive a high volume of in-person customer visits throughout most of the year. The vast majority of customers apply for service and pay their bills online through the customer portal or automated systems, which significantly reduces the demand for on-site parking.</i></p> <p><i>The exception to this trend occurs during what we refer to as the "IPP" or Influx of People Period, which typically runs from early July through early August and coincides with student move-ins and lease turnovers. From July 7th to August 5th of this year, the PUD received 2,504 start, stop, or transfer service applications and served 560 customers in person. In contrast, during the months of September through June, the office sees an average of 327 walk-in customers and processes approximately 282 service applications per month.</i></p> <p><i>In the past, the PUD has taken proactive steps to alleviate parking challenges during the Influx of People Period (IPP) by covering the cost of six (6) metered parking spaces near the Water Business Office. This includes three spaces directly in front of the building and three additional spaces along the Lumpkin Street side, providing customers with more accessible parking options during this high-traffic time.</i></p> <p><i>This temporary measure was implemented to better accommodate the influx of customers during high-demand times such as the start of the academic year referred to internally as the IPP (Influx of people period). It is important to note that because PUD operates as an enterprise fund, these parking costs are ultimately covered by ratepayers.</i></p> <p><i>To improve traffic flow and enhance safety, the department is currently in the process of installing an access gate to prohibit entry from the exit side of the lot. This measure is specifically intended to prevent vehicles from entering the lot in the wrong direction, which has created unsafe conditions for pedestrians and drivers in the limited space available.</i></p> <p><i>While the department has explored potential alternatives, no viable long-term solution has yet been identified that would ensure consistent and accessible parking for all customers. The PUD remains committed to advocating for improved parking access—especially for those with mobility needs—and will continue working with internal and external partners, including the Athens Downtown Parking Authority, to explore any feasible solutions.</i></p>

Finding #8	DEPARTMENT / MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (2020)	Status as of April 2025, Per Department
Customer Satisfaction Survey results indicate customer expectations are not being met.	Agree	<i>Implementation in Progress</i>
<b>Recommendation #11</b>	<b>Actions to be taken or plan to be implemented (2020)</b>	<b>Department's Update (2025)</b>
Technological enhancements are necessary to improve customer satisfaction. Some examples are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactive alerts — notifications via text or email when trending towards higher usage.</li> <li>Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology, which will allow customers to pay via telephone to an automated system.</li> <li>Ability to pay bill online with a credit card or e-check without a processing fee.</li> <li>View account activity in real time.</li> <li>Start, transfer, or stop service electronically and receive a confirmation number immediately indicating receipt of the form.</li> <li>Card scanners installed at each CSR station for the processing of credit card payments.</li> </ul>	<p>PUD agrees with this finding. a). Proactive Alerts: The AMI Customer Portal is currently providing customer alerts relative to potential leaks or upward trending water usage. Staff is currently trying to capture email addresses from the HTE/SunGard Billing System to increase potential customer notifications. In addition, the new Business Plan includes a revised Customer Application for Service that request an email address. All designed to increase customer notifications. B). Interactive Voice feature will be included in the RFP for the Financial Component of the Customer Portal. c). The ability to pay online with a credit card or e-check is included in the Financial Component of the Customer Portal RFP. d). View Account Status in Real Time: This is currently being accomplished regarding volume usage. The Financial Component RFP will allow same for account financials. e). Start, transfer or stop service electronically with confirmation; This feature is included in the RFP of the Customer Portal. f). WBO currently has card scanners at each Customer Service Representative station at the front counter for processing payments by credit.</p> <p><i>The Public Utilities Department (PUD) agrees that enhancing technology is essential to improving customer satisfaction and has already implemented or is actively working toward many of the features outlined in this recommendation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Proactive Alerts: The PUD provides access to WaterSmart, an online customer portal that allows users to monitor their water usage, receive alerts for unusual consumption, and view historical data. Customers must opt in to receive email or text notifications about higher-than-normal usage. The department continues to promote this tool and educate customers on its benefits to encourage greater participation.</i></li> <li><i>Interactive Voice Response (IVR): The PUD is currently working to implement IVR technology that will allow customers to pay their bills by phone through an automated system. This enhancement will provide added convenience, especially for customers who prefer not to pay online or visit the office in person. On average, the Water Business Office (WBO) processes approximately 799.5 credit card payments over the phone each month; during the peak months of July and August(IPP), this number increases to 1,826. The IVR system will not only streamline this process by eliminating the need for customers to wait on hold to speak with a representative, but it will also support the PUD's efforts to become fully PCI compliant.</i></li> <li><i>Online Bill Payment Without Fees: Customers can pay their water, sewer, stormwater, and solid waste bills online via credit card or e-check through the department's website. The PUD absorbs all processing fees, allowing customers to pay without incurring additional charges. These fees now total more than \$600,000 annually, reflecting the department's strong commitment to making payment as accessible and affordable as possible.</i></li> <li><i>Electronic Service Requests: Customers can start, stop, or transfer service electronically using online forms. The Water Business Office is working to improve this process further by ensuring that customers receive an immediate confirmation number when forms are submitted—enhancing clarity and confidence in the request process.</i></li> <li><i>Card Scanners at CSR Stations: The Water Business Office has installed card scanners at every teller window, enabling customer service representatives to process in-person credit and debit card payments quickly, securely, and efficiently.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>In addition to these technological enhancements, the PUD has invested in non-technological improvements aimed at creating a more welcoming and user-friendly environment for in-person visitors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>New Reception Area: A dedicated reception space has been created in the front lobby, where a receptionist greets and directs customers to the appropriate resources or staff members—improving flow and reducing confusion.</i></li> <li><i>Children's Learning Area (Coming Soon): The department will soon install a children's area in the lobby where young visitors can learn about the water system and Public Utilities in a fun, engaging way while their parents handle business at the office.</i></li> <li><i>Extended and Improved Business Hours: To better serve working families and customers with varied schedules, the WBO has updated its public hours to open at 8:00 a.m. Monday through Friday, with extended hours until 6:00 p.m. every Wednesday.</i></li> <li><i>Expanded Lobby Seating: Additional seating has been added in the lobby area to provide a more comfortable waiting experience for customers.</i></li> <li><i>Saturday Hours for IPP: To support the seasonal Influx of People Period (IPP)—typically aligned with the start of the academic year—the Water Business Office opens for two Saturdays during the summer. This effort helps reduce wait times, manage customer traffic more efficiently, and ensure smoother service for new residents arriving in Athens.</i></li> <li><i>As of August 5, 2025, the WBO has processed 2,504 setups for new service this year—an indicator of both high demand and the department's capacity to meet customer needs through improved systems and staffing.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The PUD is committed to continuous improvement in both technological and in-person customer service delivery and will continue evaluating and adopting new tools, service models, and strategies that promote accessibility, convenience, and overall customer satisfaction across all areas of the utility.</i></p>	

Operational Analysis Follow-Up Observations:	
<b>2020 Finding/Recommendations</b>	<i>Based on the responses from the Public Utilities Department and a fieldwork visit to the Water Business Office, the Operational Analysis Office makes the following observations:</i>
<b>Finding 1: Recommendation #1</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined.
<b>Finding 2: Recommendation #2</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined.
<b>Finding 2: Recommendation #3</b>	The HTE software is being phased out and replaced with SpryPoint, which should allow integraton with Tyler Munis, the new ERP software implemented by the finance department. This integration, however, is dependent on collaboration with both the Finance and IT departments.
<b>Finding 2: Recommendation #4</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined. Significant changes in department procedures (expedited by the Covid-19 pandemic) and personnel since the original audit tend to substantiate the fact that there now are many layers of technology being addressed simultaneously. The department is currently in the phase of migrating data from various sources into the new SpryPoint platform, which involves cleaning the data and assuring it is appropriately formated.
<b>Finding 2: Recommendation #5</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined.
<b>Finding 3: Recommendation #6</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined.
<b>Finding 4: Recommendation #7</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined.
<b>Finding 5: Recommendation #8</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined.
<b>Finding 6: Recommendation #9</b>	The collaborative effort between PUD, TPW and Solid Waste has been ongoing even before the 2020 audit. OA staff was not able to identify any written documentation of guidelines for these collaborations.
<b>Finding 7: Recommendation #10</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined. In the process of doing fieldwork for this follow-up, OA staff witnessed at least one vehicle entering the parking lot through the exit, as well as a customer with an ADA tag having to cross from one of the four designated handicap spaces across the driveway in order to access the building.
<b>Finding 8: Recommendation #11</b>	2025 update response is consistent with evidence examined.