

Manitoba Public Utilities Board Strategic Plan 2023-24

The Manitoba Public Utilities Board (the PUB) is an independent quasi-judicial administrative tribunal operating under the authority of the Manitoba Legislature. The PUB regulates utility sectors to protect the interests of Manitobans where competitive market forces do not exist. The stakeholders of the PUB are consumers of services of the utilities the PUB regulates as well as utilities and governments.

The Public Utilities Board Act dates back to 1959, when the PUB was separated from the Municipal Board and established as a freestanding, independent tribunal. The PUB's predecessor has regulated utilities since 1913. The PUB's mandate with respect to Manitoba Hydro has been changed through amendments to *The Manitoba Hydro Act* set out in *The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act*, S.M. 2022, c. 42. The amending statute also makes significant changes to *The Public Utilities Board Act*. However, those changes only come into force on proclamation, the timing of which is currently uncertain. At this time, the PUB remains bound by its existing statutory mandate and has prepared this strategic plan in accordance with the existing mandate.

Purpose

The PUB has a specific mandate based on its enabling legislation. It acts as a rate-setting tribunal for various public utilities. It establishes just and reasonable rates for the provision of electricity by Manitoba Hydro; for natural gas supplied by Centra Gas; for propane supplied by Stittco Utilities Ltd.; for rate bases and premiums charged for compulsory driver and basic vehicle insurance provided by Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation; and for rates charged by most of the water and wastewater utilities in Manitoba, excluding the City of Winnipeg. In each rate application, the PUB balances the interest of the ratepayers and the financial health of the utility. It does this through transparent hearing processes that hold the public utilities accountable.

The PUB regulates private natural gas brokers and monitors the construction and operation of gas pipelines that are subject to provincial jurisdiction.

As a quasi-judicial administrative tribunal, the PUB conducts hearings, reports to the government as requested on Payday Loans & Government Cheque Cashing, and hears appeals of Water Services Board decisions and from individuals who have been disconnected from water and wastewater utilities or from natural gas or propane services.

The PUB also undertakes other reviews, such as the review of the Efficiency Manitoba Plan for 2020-2023, as may be assigned to it from time to time by the Government.

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision: The Manitoba Public Utilities Board is a trusted, respected regulator that contributes to fair rate determinations and long-term, reliable utility services for Manitobans.

Mission: The Public Utilities Board makes decisions based on efficient, transparent regulatory processes and communicates its decisions in a timely manner.

Values: The Public Utilities Board is independent, impartial and objective, transparent, accessible to all Manitobans, supports a respectful work environment and focuses on the public interest.

Priorities

Strategic priorities will guide the work of the Public Utilities Board in fiscal year 2023-24. Operational priorities will be developed each year to implement the strategic priorities.

The strategic priorities are:

1. Excellence in the provision of regulatory decisions;
2. Effective communications and relationships;
3. Efficient internal operations; and
4. PUB 2024-25 and beyond.

Strategic priorities for fiscal year 2023-24

1. Excellence in the provision of regulatory decisions.

The Public Utilities Board employs a continuous improvement philosophy and an innovation mindset to enhance its decision-making and its responsiveness to stakeholders.

The PUB will:

- 1.1. Continue to refine the pre-hearing and hearing processes.
 - 1.2. Continue comprehensive oversight, including the use of sanctions and/or penalties to ensure that Orders are carried out.
 - 1.3. Adopt more effective ways to handle commercially sensitive information that considers the interests of all affected parties and provides maximum transparency to the public.
 - 1.4. Implement processes to improve the efficiency of hearings, including guidelines for providing required information and setting out a hierarchy of the importance of information.
 - 1.5. Increase the use of risk-based approaches to reviewing and processing applications, including evaluating opportunities to eliminate the need for applicants to file routine, low- risk applications.
2. Effective communications and relationships with stakeholders.

The Public Utilities Board maximizes the public's trust as a regulator by demonstrating that it is independent, impartial, competent, transparent and responsive. It ensures that its communications are clear and it builds and maintains effective relationships.

The PUB will:

- 2.1. Build on its expertise in stakeholder relations to enhance public notification and education, and continue to seek new methods to facilitate participation in PUB processes.
- 2.2. Continue to develop communications among government organizations that have related mandates, such as the Municipal Board, to make processes more efficient and effective.
- 2.3. Proactively engage the responsible Minister or Ministers with related responsibilities, through regular meetings to discuss PUB issues.
- 2.4. Advise the responsible Minister and/or senior provincial officials of results following major hearings and on other Orders as necessary.
- 2.5. Hold ongoing discussions with utilities and with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the Manitoba Municipal Administrators, while maintaining independence, to build on mutual understanding of issues.
- 2.6. Build on our understanding of the roles and responsibilities of, and the relationships between, PUB and key stakeholders and related organizations to ensure an integrated approach to our respective mandates.

3. Efficient internal operations.

The Public Utilities Board continues to look for operational efficiencies to make the best possible use of resources in fulfilling its mandate, and delivering on its vision and mission.

The PUB will:

- 3.1 Review and update the cross-training and succession plan for staff and the succession plan for professional advisers.
- 3.2 Integrate, define responsibilities for and train new PUB employees to maximize their ability to add value to existing teams and processes.
- 3.3 Continue to take advantage of technology to introduce more efficiency in information sharing and communications, and take measures to secure PUB information and equipment.
- 3.4 Continue to update the Board governance model to ensure the strategic focus of Board Panels and Committees.
- 3.5 Manage PUB resources to ensure they are aligned with fulfilling the PUB's mandate.
- 3.6 Adopt and apply best practices employed by Regulators in other jurisdictions.

4. PUB 2024-25 and beyond.

To deliver on its vision the Public Utilities Board takes a long-term view to ensure it meets its mandate in the future.

The goals are:

- 4.1 An understanding of an amended Public Utilities Board Act and Regulations.
- 4.2 A PUB Strategic Planning process that leads to a Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2024-25 to 2026-27
- 4.3 Adequate resources for the PUB to carry out its mandate.

Operational priorities for fiscal year 2023-24

External priorities:

1. Address rate applications from major utilities, as well as Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, as filed.
2. Address applications from Water and Wastewater utilities.
3. Increase the use of the simplified filing process for water and wastewater applications through awareness building and support to eligible Utilities.
4. Communicate the updated Board Guidelines for Water and Wastewater Utilities to municipal utilities.
5. Continue to communicate with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the Manitoba Municipal Administrators regarding available webinars, and share information on issues such as rate adequacy, the difference between PUB directives and recommendations, how debentures relate to utility rates and when to file an application with the PUB.
6. Continue to meet with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the Manitoba Municipal Administrators and other stakeholders as required to build better mutual understanding with members.
7. Begin the process to revise the PUB Rules of Practice and Procedures to reflect current PUB practices and the regulatory environment.
8. Continue to follow up on directives from prior PUB Orders and to address outstanding compliance issues.
9. Upon direction of the responsible Minister, prepare to conduct public hearings on Payday Loans & Government Cheque Cashing and to report the results to the Government.
10. Taking into consideration the views of major Utilities and interveners of record, approve and implement a revised policy and procedures to deal with the granting of status, and the funding of interveners in PUB processes.
11. Develop and implement a revised process for dealing with Commercially Sensitive Information.
12. Continue to employ technology solutions to encourage distance participation of witnesses and the public in PUB processes.
13. Develop and employ expertise in communicating and consulting with stakeholders using social media tools.

14. Monitor the results of Efficiency Manitoba as required following the decision of Government regarding the PUB report and recommendations on the Efficiency Manitoba Plan for 2020 – 2024.

Internal priorities:

1. Develop and share a PUB Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2024-25 to 2026-27.
2. Revise the succession plan for PUB staff and develop a plan for integrating new employees into existing PUB areas.
3. Take steps to support employee wellbeing.
4. Update the inventory of issues and report on the status of each area of PUB responsibility to the Board on a regular basis.
5. Identify and monitor the status of PUB directives to Utilities, and report to the Board on a regular basis.
6. Monitor the succession plans of PUB advisers. Review and address, to the extent possible, the risk that PUB advisers may not be readily available to advise the PUB.
7. Require pre-approved advisor budgets aligned with process scopes determined by lead advisors.
8. Continue to monitor and evaluate the performance of PUB advisers based on reporting against established objectives.
9. Require lead advisors to provide retrospective reviews of all major processes, and track the results to ensure recommendations are addressed.
10. Perform a detailed review of market rates for professional external advisor services as per a Board decision that a detailed review is to be performed every 5 years, with the next one due by December 2023.
11. Identify potential risks to PUB operations, develop mitigation strategies for each and update the PUB Business Continuity Plan accordingly.
12. Investigate whistleblower protocols in other regulatory agencies, with a view to developing a PUB protocol.