

**Department of Water Management
2021 Budget Hearing
Remarks of Randy Conner, Commissioner
November 2020**

Good afternoon Chairman Dowell, members of the Committee on Budget and Government Operations and members of the City Council. I am pleased to appear before you today to present and discuss the 2021 budget proposal for the Department of Water Management (DWM).

The mission of the 2,000 men and women of the Department of Water Management is to deliver high-quality drinking water in the most environmentally and fiscally responsible manner possible while also efficiently managing waste and storm water. DWM purifies on average about 750 million gallons of water a day. We operate two water treatment plants and 12 pumping stations that distribute water through more than 4,300 miles of water mains. On the sewer side, the department is responsible for the transmission of wastewater through more than 4,400 miles of sewer mains to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

We provide purified water to more than 2.7 million customers in Chicago and another 2.7 million customers in 120 surrounding suburbs. On a daily basis, approximately 5.4 million customers, or 42% of the Illinois population, depend on us for their drinking water. We perform over 900,000 water sampling analyses a year of water throughout the treatment system 24/7 and adjust treatment protocols as necessary to ensure that our water is clean and safe.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to succeed with our mission of providing clean, safe drinking water to our customers. While observing all safety protocols set forward by CDPH, OSHA and our labor partners we have continued the 10-year Capital Improvement Program begun in 2012 to replace aging water and sewer mains to ensure that accountholders have a reliable water system; a mission made even more important during the pandemic.

Since 2012, DWM has replaced 750 miles of water main and 189 miles of sewer mains. We have lined 438.5 miles of sewer main and converted one pumping station from steam to more efficient and reliable electric power.

We continue to push to make the programmatic goals of 880 miles of water main and 220 miles of sewer main replaced, and 479 miles of sewer main lined to complete the Program.

Since 1993, Chicago's water has tested under the U.S. EPA's benchmark for lead in drinking water. However, with almost 400,000 lead service lines connecting mostly single family homes and two flats to our water system, concerns about lead in drinking water are being proactively addressed to ensure the City can further meet these standards.

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The City recently announced a Lead Service Line Replacement Program to provide homeowners with a couple of options for voluntarily replacing their lead lines.

Pending approval by the City Council, the proposed Homeowner Initiated Program will waive approximately \$3000 in permitting fees for any eligible homeowner who chooses to replace their lead service line. The Equity Program will offer free replacement to homeowners whose water tests over 15 ppb and qualify as low income. This program is grant-funded and DWM will continue to identify funding sources moving forward to continue the program in subsequent years.

DWM will also conduct a block-level water main and lead service line replacement project to provide relevant information in order to develop a long-term program to address this pervasive legacy infrastructure issue.

DWM is also currently conducting a study around ultrasonic water meters which have no moving parts unlike the traditional meters previously used. We are reaching out to those already on the waiting list for the MeterSave program to recruit participants for this study.

Last year, DWM announced two pilots designed to leverage alternative pipe replacement technologies. As the pandemic has called upon us to prioritize work that most immediately impacts the health of not only the public, but also our employees, we have had to extend the timeline for completion of these pilots. We are continuing to work proactively with our partners to get these projects back online.

We are committed to providing the highest level of professional service to our customers and building a strong water infrastructure to meet Chicago's needs now and for generations to come.

Thank you.