

**Department of Water Management
2022 Budget Hearing
Remarks of Dr. Andrea Cheng, Commissioner
October 1, 2021**

Chairman Dowell, members of the Committee on Budget and Government Operations and members of the City Council, I am honored and humbled to appear before you today for the first time as commissioner to present and discuss the 2022 budget proposal for the Department of Water Management (DWM).

The 2,000 employees of the Department of Water Management deliver about 750 million gallons of high-quality drinking water to more than 5.3 million customers in Chicago and 120 surrounding suburbs daily. 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.

Since the budget hearing last year, DWM has made tremendous strides towards making our water system more modern and efficient while creating even greater financial security.

At the beginning of this year, Joliet selected DWM as their water supplier, opening a gateway to adding more suburban customers in the southwest region of the state. We know Chicago provides the best water sources in this region. Selecting Chicago for their water represents hundreds of millions of dollars in future revenue for our water system. Pending the final agreement, we are developing plans for the substantial expansion of our infrastructure to accommodate these new customers. Moving forward, it will be a priority of the department to strengthen our relationships with the 120 suburbs we currently serve and to further expand our reach into new communities.

This spring, the new state of the art \$15 million chemistry and microbiology labs opened at Jardine. These new laboratories will ensure that we have the newest, most accurate tools available to monitor, analyze and treat the water in our system.

We rely upon the data that comes from our labs to make critical decisions about how to treat our water, and whenever possible, data will be at the center of all decisions I make at Water Management moving forward.

For example, I requested that all open work orders be evaluated to remove duplicates and determine which were already completed. The remaining open work orders were investigated and assigned a priority and scheduled for completion. In addition, work orders located on our CIP work were completed as part of the project. These efforts resulted in a 67% reduction in work orders from 2019 to date.

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In order to address longstanding flooding and sewer surcharge issues on the City's South side, DWM is designing a new 8.3-mile-long tunnel to help to manage stormwater.

The Area 4 Tunnel will help alleviate flooding for approximately 30 square miles, which contain 30,000 homes and businesses.

The tunnel is anticipated to run along 95th Street between Halsted and Martin Luther King Drive then north to 90th Street between King and Jeffery Boulevard then south to 106th Street and Torrence Avenue. While we are only at the design stage and are actively sourcing full funding for construction, this represents a switch from basic replacement of sewers to funding master-designed projects that create massive impact for communities.

But we didn't stop there. After decades of inaction, the Lightfoot Administration decided to undertake removal of lead service lines in Chicago. With over 380,000 lead lines installed in houses and two-flats across the city built before 1986, we have the largest number- and the biggest removal challenge- in the country.

More recently, State regulations passed requiring that municipalities start the planning for and removal of lead lines on a 50-year timeline. While we fight for substantial federal assistance from the proposed federal infrastructure bill, we are also planning for a substantial shift in the way that we work. In 2021 alone, we rolled out three new Lead Service Line Replacement (LSLR) programs.

DWM is preparing a block-level water main and lead service line replacement pilot to better understand what kind of challenges specific to our city and infrastructure we will face as we prepare to incorporate the removal of lead lines when water mains are replaced as part of our Capital Improvement Plan. This represents a shift in our focus and will require different planning procedures, testing of new construction techniques and an expansion of our community outreach efforts to increase public participation.

No matter the type of projects we perform, I am committed to ensuring that a baseline of equity exists at DWM. For homeowners who would like to replace their service lines but do not have the resources to do so, the Equity LSLR Program offers a completely free lead service line replacement for income-eligible homeowners with either elevated lead levels in their water or for families who have children 18 and under living in their homes.

For homeowners who do not meet the income requirements, up to \$3,100 in permit fees will be waived for voluntary service line replacements as part of our Homeowner Initiated LSLR Program.

Again, relying on data, DWM analyzed return rates on our free water testing program and determined that there were geographic disparities between lower income areas and the rest of the city. We are working to determine why the response rate has been lower in these targeted areas and plan to engage in dedicated outreach to them encouraging return of the completed test kits.

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More broadly, I will expand upon efforts to continuously incorporate equity into the work of DWM. In addition to the mandatory annual EEO training for all DWM employees that is conducted by the Department of Human Resources, we are also working with the Mayor's Office for Equity and Racial Justice to launch a Leadership Training Conference for DWM managers and supervisors.

Additionally, DWM is also set to participate in the inaugural "Equity and Racial Justice Learning Cohort." This is a rigorous 9-month training program designed to build racial equity knowledge and skillsets for government leaders. By training our leaders in racial equity, we believe it will better equip them with the ability to recognize systemic and implicit biases and provide effective tools and strategies for addressing them. We continue to strive for a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce is always continuing. I believe that these additional efforts will continue to help build and sustain a workforce where every employee can succeed and thrive.

Finally, I have spent my career- including the last 17 years at DWM- dedicated to water quality. Ultimately, delivering clean, safe, high-quality drinking water in an efficient and sustainable manner is our job at Water Management. That is what we do every single day. I look forward to working with all of you as we continue to improve and expand our world-class water system.

Thank you.