

# Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE March 22, 2024

TO Honorable Mayor and Members of the Dallas City Council

SUBJECT **North Texas Municipal Water District Sanitary Sewer Overflow Update Regarding White Rock Creek**

This memorandum is to provide the attached information sent by the North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD) related to the recent mechanical failure that led to the sanitary sewer overflow in Plano at White Rock Creek and to provide an update on Dallas Water Utilities (DWU) activities related to the overflow. The City of Dallas (City) was notified on March 14, 2024, of this sanitary sewer overflow. The City of Plano and NTMWD also gave public notice pursuant to Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) regulations.

Once notified, DWU staff immediately initiated standard operating protocols for sanitary sewer overflows that involve waterways within the city limits. Staff has been monitoring the conditions of and sampling the water quality in White Rock Creek from near Frankford Road to the spillway area of White Rock Lake (WRL) at seven locations. Sampling includes field and lab tests for parameters such as pH levels, dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity, ammonia, phosphorous, nitrates, turbidity, and E. coli. Sampling results for E. coli have been shared with TCEQ.

To date, the primary impact to the waterway has been the presence of elevated E. coli. The latest results (for samples taken yesterday, March 21, 2024) indicate that E. coli levels are still elevated and above normal at WRL – Bathhouse site. Levels at the WRL-Pumphouse site have returned to normal. E. coli levels in White Rock Creek remain elevated. Locations where levels are still high are anticipated to return to normal ranges in the next several days, if not earlier.

DWU continues to monitor water quality and the Park and Recreation Department will continue to suspend White Rock Lake operations until E. coli levels are within normal limits. TCEQ is the lead agency for all governmental investigative and subsequent enforcement actions that may occur because of this sanitary sewer overflow.

Future updates with respect to this sanitary sewer overflow, which could include any information from TCEQ or NTMWD will be presented to the City Council, as received by the City.

DATE March 22, 2024  
SUBJECT **2024 Drought Contingency Plan Memo to T&I Committee**  
PAGE **2 of 2**

For additional questions regarding the ongoing efforts of the City's sampling, please contact Sarah Standifer, Interim Director of Dallas Water Utilities. For additional questions regarding White Rock Lake recreational use, please contact John Jenkins, Director of Dallas Park and Recreation.

Putting Service First,



Kimberly Bizer Tolbert  
Deputy City Manager

[Attached]

c: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager  
Tammy Palomino, City Attorney  
Mark Swann, City Auditor  
Biliera Johnson, City Secretary  
Preston Robinson, Administrative Judge  
Jon Fortune, Deputy City Manager

Majed A. Al-Ghafry, Assistant City Manager  
M. Elizabeth (Liz) Cedillo-Pereira, Assistant City Manager  
Dr. Robert Perez, Assistant City Manager  
Jack Ireland, Chief Financial Officer  
Genesis D. Gavino, Chief of Staff to the City Manager  
Directors and Assistant Directors



March 22, 2024

The Honorable Mayor Eric Johnson and Dallas City Council  
Dallas City Hall  
1500 Marilla St.  
Dallas, Texas 75201

Re: City of Plano Sanitary Sewer Overflow and NTMWD Lower White Rock Creek Lift Station

Dear Honorable Mayor and Council:

First and foremost, I value our long-standing collaborative and cooperative relationship with the City of Dallas. I want to express my appreciation for how the City of Dallas staff has stepped forward to respond to this recent event. Through difficult situations such as these, we will continue to work collaboratively to address the needs of our region.

As you know, on March 14, a portion of North Texas Municipal Water District's (NTMWD) wastewater infrastructure in Plano malfunctioned, resulting in a sanitary sewer overflow that impacted White Rock Lake. The infrastructure that malfunctioned was our Lower White Rock Creek Lift Station in the City of Plano, near the Dallas North Tollway and President George Bush Turnpike.

This issue has been traced back to a significant valve failure within the lift station. After the valve failed, the lift station flooded, including the dry well containing the lift station's pumps and motors. We believe this caused the motors to cease operating and the lift station to stop working, which led to the overflow.

The response to this overflow was a collaborative effort by the City of Plano and NTMWD, and both entities followed standard operating procedures to reduce the impact of the spill. Water from a hydrant was used to help dilute the sewage, and the cleanup began as soon as the overflow stopped. Plano's environmental health team also quickly began testing the water in the creek.

Our team has been working around the clock with the City of Plano to respond to the overflow and cooperating with the appropriate regulatory agencies. The lift station has been partially restored and is operating, and full repairs are nearing completion.

As this situation has evolved, questions have been raised about what NTMWD and Plano will do in the future to prevent sanitary sewer overflows. As part of a joint press release with the City of Plano on March 20, we highlighted many of the proactive steps NTMWD and the City of Plano have taken in recent years to reduce sanitary sewer overflows.

**Regional Service Through Unity...Meeting Our Region's Needs Today and Tomorrow**

To ensure the safety and reliability of our systems, NTMWD implemented a revamped and expanded maintenance program for our wastewater conveyance system in 2017. Around this time, NTMWD also renewed our Sanitary Sewer Overflow Initiative (SSOI) agreement with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Our approach has included proactive pipeline inspections and rehabilitation, as well as the recent upgrade and renewal of the Lower White Rock Creek Lift Station which was completed in 2020. Since implementing these programs, NTMWD has seen about a 50 percent decrease in sanitary sewer overflows.

The City of Plano is taking a myriad of steps to reduce the number of Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs). Since 2019, the number of SSOs from manholes has trended down. Plano also participates in the SSOI program with the TCEQ and has taken proactive steps in inspecting and cleaning sewer mains, manholes, and aerial sewer crossings. For more on NTMWD and the City of Plano's proactive steps to maintain our wastewater systems and prevent SSOs, we'd encourage you to read our full press release (included below).

As noted in the press release, while the ultimate goal for our wastewater systems is no overflows, even with preventative maintenance, these events may occasionally occur due to unforeseen mechanical issues, clogs in the wastewater system, or excessive rainfall. As part of our long-term maintenance program, we'll continue to partner closely with our communities to invest in maintaining our regional water, wastewater, and solid waste systems to meet the needs of our region.

Sincerely,



JENNAFER P. COVINGTON

Executive Director

CC: T.C. Broadnax, Dallas City Manager

Kimberly Bazor Tolbert, Dallas Deputy City Manager

Mark Israelson, Plano City Manager

March 20, 2024

## **North Texas Municipal Water District, City of Plano Respond to Sanitary Sewer Overflow**

### **North Texas Municipal Water District Statement**

The North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD) remains committed to protecting public health and the environment. We work closely with our communities to ensure safe, reliable operations of our regional wastewater conveyance systems, including preventing sanitary sewer overflows. However, even with preventative maintenance, these events may occasionally occur due to unforeseen mechanical issues, clogs in the wastewater system, or excessive rainfall.

The recent mechanical failure that led to the overflow in Plano was unfortunate, and we're working around the clock to remedy the situation with the City of Plano and the appropriate regulatory agencies.

To ensure the safety and reliability of our systems, we implemented a revamped and expanded maintenance program for our wastewater conveyance system in 2017. Around this time, NTMWD also renewed our Sanitary Sewer Overflow Initiative (SSOI) agreement with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Our SSOI established a proactive approach to reducing sanitary sewer overflows, and as part of that agreement, NTMWD committed to inspecting all our gravity wastewater pipelines within a ten-year period.

We completed the inspection of approximately 80 percent of the gravity pipelines over the first seven years of the program, and the results have indicated that a vast majority of the pipelines are in good to excellent condition. Pipelines of concern have been scheduled for rehabilitation, and that work is ongoing.

The NTMWD wastewater conveyance team operates 24 lift stations and over 240 miles of large diameter pipelines throughout our service area. Lift stations, which help move wastewater to our wastewater treatment plants, are critical components of our wastewater system. Each lift station is checked by our staff every day, and all our lift stations are monitored 24/7 through a sophisticated control system. Comprehensive lift station condition assessments are completed every five years to identify long-term rehabilitation needs.

The Lower White Rock Creek Lift Station was constructed in 1976 and expanded in 1987. The lift station underwent a significant upgrade and renewal completed in 2020, which included all new electrical systems, pumps, and valves.

As part of our long-term maintenance program, we'll continue to partner closely with our communities to invest in maintaining our regional water, wastewater, and solid waste systems to meet the needs of our growing region.

## City of Plano Statement

The City of Plano is taking a myriad of steps to reduce the number of Sanitary Sewer Overflows. Since 2019, the numbers of sewage spills from manholes are trending down. We believe the decrease is due to the proactive steps the City has taken to replace and reline aging sewer pipes and improve lift stations. We also conduct routine inspections of our facilities and lines.

It's important to note the wide array of causes of the overflows. Foreign objects that don't belong in the sewage lines often play a role including flushable wipes, rags and grease. While this wasn't the cause of the latest spill, it's important that people know we can all play a role in reducing the causes.

The City of Plano participates in the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) voluntary Sanitary Sewer Overflow Initiative. This helps identify the sources of our SSOs and how we proactively address them. Since joining the program, the City is making great progress on the 2025 proactive maintenance goals that reduce Sanitary Sewer Overflows in the system.:

- Goal 1: To date we have completed inspections on 65% of our sewer mains.
- Goal 2: To date we have completed cleaning of 88% of our sewer mains.
- Goal 3: To date we have completed inspections on 94% of our manholes.

Based on these initiatives and programs, we have steadily reduced the number of SSOs. Ultimately, our goal is no overflows. However, with a system of our size, like most cities in the region, are going to have these incidents happen from time to time. We vow to respond to each and every one in a timely, responsible and effective manner to ensure the environmental impact is minimal.

Additional programs we have in place through our proactive efforts include:

- Annual inspections of our sewer aerial crossings
- Re-inspecting aerial crossings after storm events to identify damage from debris.
- Proactive cleaning of "trouble spot" sewer mains on a 2-month, 3-month or 6-month schedule to prevent SSOs due to grease, wipes, or other items collecting in the sewer lines.
- Daily lift station inspections that include checking pumps, motors, seals, valves, sump pumps and flood alarms; fence lines and building are also checked for security purposes. More in-depth inspections of structural, electrical and mechanical systems are completed annually.
- Real-time flow monitoring throughout the system to evaluate infiltration/inflow (I/I) and key monitoring of previous SSO locations to respond before an SSO occurs.
- Proactive sewer system rehabilitation for manholes and sewer mains.
- Completed the Inflow and Infiltration Study of the Lower White Rock Creek and North Dallas Trunk Basins in January 2022. Two Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Studies (SSES) have been completed since and included inspections and testing of 739 manholes and 213,380 linear feet of pipe.
- Our Community Investment Program (CIP) for 2023-2024 includes more than \$19.5 million in projects to rehab or repair sewer infrastructure, clean and maintain sewer mains, lift station improvements, permanent flow monitoring, and projects to address development or capacity issues.
- Implementation of a grease trap inspection program in 2018 that completes regular inspections based on a tier system approach. From 2022 – 23, over 621 grease trap and 189 grit trap inspections were performed during the current reporting period.

- Education and outreach to residents and businesses are ongoing about proper disposal of fats, oils, grease (FOG) and disposable wipes.

All of the initiatives listed above were introduced with the goal of significantly reducing SSOs in the system and minimizing flows from SSOs when they happen. The City of Plano has been and will continue to be committed to minimizing the occurrence of SSOs in the system through both proactive methods and swift responses with timely notifications when incidents occur.

### **Media Contacts**

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