

DWM 2023 BUDGET SPEECH V

Good afternoon, Chairman Dowell, members of the Committee on Budget and Government Operations and members of the City Council. I am Dr. Andrea Holthouse Cheng, Commissioner of the Department of Water Management (DWM) and I am pleased to appear before you today to present and discuss our 2023 budget proposal.

The mission of the 2,000 men and women of the Department of Water Management is to deliver high-quality drinking water and to efficiently manage waste and storm water. We operate two of the world's largest conventional purification plants, 12 pumping stations that distribute 750 million gallons of water daily through more than 4,300 miles of water mains to 5.3 million people in Chicago and 120 suburbs. That's almost half the state of Illinois. On the sewer side, the department is responsible for the transmission of wastewater and stormwater through more than 4,400 miles of sewer mains to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

We take this responsibility very seriously and public health is our primary concern. We perform over 600,000 analyses of water per year throughout the treatment system 24/7 and adjust treatment protocols as necessary. We also monitor water quality in Lake Michigan to identify potential issues early and to protect the lake from polluters. The result of these steps is that Chicago's drinking water is safe. For years, Chicago's water has tested under the U.S. EPA's benchmark for lead in drinking water.

This month we will begin performing complete replacements- including the private side- whenever there is a break or leak on the service line- at no cost to the customer. We have also begun to reach out to licensed daycares in low-income neighborhoods to begin replacing their lines- also completely free. This is in addition to the existing Equity Lead Service Line Replacement program which provides free replacements for low-income homeowners who reside in their own home.

The MeterSave program was re-started in May of this year, with prioritization of zip codes with the highest level of water debt so that these residents will only be billed for what they use, not an estimate. We expect to have completed installations for everyone on the waiting list who still wants a meter before January 1, 2023.

Through DWM's free water testing program, over 94,500 kits have been mailed out since 2016. To promote transparency about what is in our drinking water, we voluntarily post anonymized results of water tests on chicagowaterquality.org.

For a decade DWM has aggressively worked on an accelerated Capital Improvement Program to replace Chicago's aging water infrastructure to create a more reliable and efficient system. Since 2012, DWM has replaced 783 miles of water main and 210 miles of sewer mains. We have lined 565 miles of sewer main and rehabbed 97,686 sewer structures to extend their functional lives.

With COVID-19, huge supply chain disruptions and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150 strike, our progress has slowed substantially in recent years. Despite this, we did meet, and even exceed, many of the program's goals.

Lead service line replacement will be a huge multi-year, multi-billion-dollar lift over the next 50 years. But it will grow Chicago's construction industry and create good new jobs for thousands. Last year, we

filled 306 vacancies, the majority of which will work on replacements. They are 135 new hires, 100 hired from other departments, and 71 internal promotions.

Climate change is impacting Chicago with more 50- and 100-year storms that dump large amounts of stormwater in a compressed period of time. So this year we focused on designing regional solutions to the resulting increased flooding. Our Area 4 project includes constructing an 8-mile tunnel to direct the surplus stormwater to MWRD. Approximately 30,000 residences should see reduced flooding. We are in the design phase and sourcing funding for these massive projects.

In line with Mayor Lightfoot's mandate that equity underpins all of our work, we have taken several critical steps to ensure that ours is a welcoming work environment and that we are administering our programs fairly. These include:

- Developed in internal equity cohort and participated in the OERJ's exercises to determine a workstream in which equity could be promoted.
- Retained a consultant to train all DWM leaders on equitable practices and then lead their teams through exercises designed to broaden perspectives and challenge employees to be more inclusive of other points of view in their thinking.
- Created an internal DEI Resource website for employees

It was a great thrill to welcome so many of you on the tours we conducted this spring at the Jardine and Sawyer Water Purification Plants. I was excited to introduce the portal we developed for aldermen to share real-time customized information with you on the status of open work orders in your wards. My staff conducted trainings for 25 of your offices, and we would be very happy to train any staff you send our way. I hope that this app has been a useful resource.

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 future generations. I pledge to continue to work with all of you on these important water issues.

Thank you.