

# **CITY OF CHICAGO – Department of Water Management**

## **2025 Budget Hearing**

**November 22, 2024**

### **Randy Conner, Commissioner**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Ervin, members of the Committee on Budget and Government Operations and members of the City Council. I am Randy Conner, Commissioner of the Department of Water Management (DWM), and I am pleased to appear before you today to present and discuss our 2025 budget proposal.

The mission of the 2,000 men and women of DWM is to deliver high-quality drinking water and to efficiently manage waste and rainwater. We operate two of the world's largest conventional purification plants and 12 pumping stations that distribute 750 million gallons of water daily through more than 4,300 miles of water mains to 5.1 million people in Chicago and 120 suburbs.

That's 41 percent of the state of Illinois. On the sewer side, the department is responsible for the transmission of wastewater and rainwater through more than 4,500 miles of sewer mains to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago for processing.

Protecting public health is our primary concern and we take this responsibility very seriously. 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. The result of these steps is that for years Chicago's drinking water has met or exceeded all federal, state and industry regulations including those for lead.

My priorities as Commissioner are to identify and increase efficiencies at DWM while serving our customers in an equitable manner.

To ensure that we are functioning as good public stewards of our resources—time, effort and money—I have reorganized the department to set us up for success.

Listening to the priorities of residents and council members, I have empowered staff to make our work more efficient and reduce overtime and expenditures while improving and prioritizing customer service.

I have created a new Division of Restoration to ensure that any job we do is completely finished by restoring the site in a timely manner. As you know, this is a main source of resident frustration after any construction work.

I have realigned responsibilities under existing titles to better leverage the expertise of staff. Our Managing Deputy Commissioner of Operations and Distribution will now oversee the Bureau of Water Supply which includes water treatment, pumping, and water quality. The Division of Procurement Services and Regional Partnerships will be overseen by our Managing Deputy Commissioner for Contracts/Regulatory/Legal. To better streamline field coordination, all plumbing inspections will be combined under the Division of Meter Services and placed under the management of our Deputy Commissioner for LSLR Programs.

DWM is an agile department that is constantly changing depending on the priorities and needs of the City. As Commissioner, I am always evaluating the direction that the department is headed. I will ensure that we are aligned with Mayor Brandon Johnson's vision, agenda, and policies. I will also ensure the department is functioning at its highest level.

At the center of all our work is equity--in our staff, in our contracts and in our operations. We are looking forward to working with our union and educational partners to train and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the face of our City.

Our lead service line replacement (LSLR) programs represent substantial investments over the upcoming decades. Good careers with well-paying jobs will be the result and I want to be very intentional about everyone benefitting from them--particularly those from historically disinvested communities.

Recently, we were awarded the first ever Department of Procurement Services (DPS) Contracting Equity Award as 49 percent of our contracts go to diverse firms. However, that is not good enough. We have been working very hard with DPS to create more opportunities for smaller, minority-owned firms to bid on our projects.

We have also started to develop contract opportunities through the use of the Small Business Initiative (SBI) and divided up larger contracts to make them accessible to these firms. We have lowered insurance and bonding requirements and included more North American Industry Classification System Codes to make room for different types of firms as subcontractors.

When I was at DWM as Commissioner the first time, I mandated diversity training for all 2,000 DWM employees. Upon my return, I have expanded our focus on DEI by hiring a DEI Officer and will continue the department's DEI education initiatives by offering a series of workshops on mental health so that employees and supervisors can create a welcoming environment that promotes understanding and well-being.

Operationally, the first of the lead service line replacement programs we stood up was the Equity Program. Committed to helping those least able to replace a lead service line themselves, we were

the first to use Community Development Block Grant funding to create a replacement program for those who are income qualified.

With the goal of replacing lead lines at all licensed daycares in Chicago, our Daycare Program prioritizes daycares located in lower-income census areas to create the maximum benefit for the children who attend them.

Looking ahead, we are always improving our lead service line replacement programs. It is no secret that with over 400,000 lead service lines installed before 1986, their replacement will be a huge, multi-year, multi-billion-dollar effort. Our programs replace both the public and the private sides of the lines for free, amplifying the need to secure funding. We continue to work with our federal and State partners to leverage any dollars available for this cornerstone of our work.

We are committed to providing the highest level of professional service for our customers and building a strong, sustainable water infrastructure to meet Chicago's needs now and for future generations. I look forward to working with each of you on these important water issues.