



City of Elgin
Bastrop & Travis Counties, Texas
2021 WINTER STORM EVENT
Debriefing Report

Thomas L. Mattis
City Manager

March 10, 2021



City of Elgin Office of the City Manager

City Hall · 310 North Main Street · P.O. Box 591
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2021 WINTER STORM EVENT Debriefing Report March 9, 2021

The City of Elgin – along with all other Central Texans – faced a historical winter storm event on February 12-22 that adversely impacted all residents and city water customers. The City faced many challenges and a variety of issues because of the storm - but understanding the main issue related to city operations and problems our residents faced is relatively easy:

- a) **The primary system failure – and the only one unmanageable by the City – was that of the electric power system operated by Oncor**, the service provider to both the city in general and the City’s Water Treatment Plant.
- b) Had the City not had an unprecedented loss of electrical power for thirty-six (36) consecutive hours (preceded by three days of intermittent power loss) – **city water customers would have never lost water service nor would we have had to issue a Boil Water Notice.**

All City departments and operations generally functioned in an appropriate and effective manner given the uniqueness of the storm and the limited resources available to staff. It is clear that in many ways, the City of Elgin’s overall operational response to this unprecedented storm was as effective as many, if not most, other local governments and water providers within our region.

All this does not mean, however, that there are no operational weaknesses nor upgrades that can be considered to help improve opportunities for a more desired response from city forces, if such an event were to happen again in Elgin. Those items as identified by staff and discussed in this report.

The following pages provide detailed assessments of the daily issues faced by operations staff, our response to same in real time, and some of the results of our efforts:

Pages 1-5 Chronological Listing of Daily Issues and Operational Responses (February 12-22)

Page 6 Public Information Distribution

Page 7 Directed Distribution of Available Bottled Water

Page 8 Potential Areas for Operational Upgrades

Page 9 Boil Water Notice/Recognition of Staff

I wish to commend city staff, as well as the Mayor and City Councilmembers, for their efforts and teamwork in working through the challenges and responding to the needs of the Elgin community in its time of need.

Thomas L. Mattis
City Manager

Friday, February 12

Weather conditions: Icy road conditions/accumulation; high north winds with low temp 29 degrees

Operational issues:

- COVID vaccination event delayed due to weather conditions
- Waste Management pulls collection trucks due to weather conditions

Staff activity:

- Public Works and Utility departments begin review and winterization efforts consistent with standard operating practices (adding heat lamps, insulating critical valves, testing of generators)
 - Elevated water storage tank at EHS begins to drain water for planned maintenance and tank repair
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Saturday, February 13

Weather conditions: High 31 and low 26; snow overnight

Operational issues:

- None identified

Staff activity:

- Public Works/Utility depts continue standard operating practices for operational winterization efforts
 - Street Maintenance begins sanding roadways
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Sunday, February 14

Weather conditions: Snow continued throughout the day; High 30/Low 13 degrees

Operational issues:

- Power outages begin; initially rolling outages; adversely affecting water production and treatment operations (all pumps must be re-set manually each time power goes out)
- Power outages disable wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) operations (generator available, but equipment issues delayed use)
- Power outage causes motor to fail on Water Well No. 16
- SCADA system fails as pressure gauges freeze – compelling staff to estimate water storage levels
- City streets and roadways unsafe to travel
- City Hall telephones and internet fail
- No declaration/order from Governor or Bastrop County Judge to open emergency shelter

Staff activity:

- Increased/active social media messaging begins on all city platforms
 - Water treatment plant (WTP) operations shift to 24-hour monitoring
 - WWTP operations shift to 24-hour monitoring
 - Emergency power generator engaged to maintain wastewater treatment plant operations
 - Immediate interaction with phone company and information technology (IT) support, efforting to bring City Hall telephones and internet back on-line
 - With no phones or internet at City Hall and other city buildings, senior management team works remotely from locations with communication capabilities
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Monday, February 15

Weather conditions: Snow – High temperature 25/Low 8 degrees; Snow continued.

Operational issues:

- Power outages continue; adversely affecting both water and wastewater operations

- Water service maintained throughout City, but power outages prevent system recovery, significantly reducing water storage
- Mechanical issues occur with WWTP emergency generator
- City streets and roadways unsafe to travel
- City Hall telephones and internet remain non-functioning
- Diesel fuel supply for city vehicles and operations becomes very limited
- Waste Management cancels collection services
- Unified directive from the Governor, County Judges, TxDOT, and EM professionals is to not open emergency shelters – and to encourage citizens to stay off roadways for overall safety and welfare
- No declaration/order from Governor or Bastrop County Judge to open emergency shelter

Staff activity:

- WTP and WWTP operations continue with 24-hour monitoring
- WTP and WWTP operators unable (until mid-day) to reach workstations using city-issued vehicles due to road conditions and access issues
- Continue increased social media messaging on all city platforms
- Continued efforts with phone company/IT support - City Hall phones & internet
- With no phones/internet at City Hall etc., senior management continues to work remotely
- Emergency generator at wastewater treatment plant repaired
- Supporting unified directives, unanimous staff consensus is to not attempt to open city shelters or ‘warming centers’, due to limited resources and that safe access by the public to/from facilities could not be assured

Tuesday, February 16

Weather conditions: Continuing snow; High 26/Low 7 degrees; overnight rain/ice accumulation

Operational issues:

- Power outages continue; adversely affecting water production & treatment operations
- Water service maintained throughout City, but power outages prevent system recovery, reducing available water to minimum levels
- Low water pressure and boil notices begin in nearly all Central Texas cities/counties
- City streets and roadways still unsafe to travel
- City Hall telephones and internet remain non-functioning
- City offices remain closed due to lack of utilities and safe travel routes to work for employees
- Waste Management cancels collection services
- While acknowledging the staff position and safety concerns related to a ‘warming centers’, a majority of City Council expresses a desire to provide one at the City Recreation Center
- No declaration/order from Governor or Bastrop County Judge to open emergency shelter
- Water main break on Avenue C at 7:30pm – essentially draining all remaining water in system

Staff activity:

- Continue increased social media messaging on all city platforms
- Formal request made by EPD Chief for maximum amount of bottled drinking water from Texas Department of Emergency Management (30,000 gal) through Bastrop County EOC
- Staff begins prepares for a temporary ‘warming center’ at Recreation Center to open by evening
- WTP and WWTP operations convert to 24-hour staffing
- Continued efforts with phone company/IT support - City Hall phones & internet repairs

- City offices closed due to lack of utilities and safe travel routes to work for employees
- Due to Avenue C water main break, no water service available at Recreation Center which prevents opening of temporary ‘warming center’
- Anticipating restoration of water supply in reasonable timeframe, plans implemented for opening temporary ‘warming center’ at Recreation Center Wednesday morning
- Sufficient diesel fuel supply secured for generators and vehicles

Wednesday, February 17

Weather conditions: Snow/rain/sleet; High 32 degrees, low 24 degrees – creating snow, ice, snow layers

Operational issues:

- Complete power outage at Water Treatment Plat (**6:45am**)
- Water distribution system drained; no drinking water available
- Boil Water Notice issued
- Due to lack of drinking water & restroom facilities, temporary ‘warming center’ cannot be opened
- No water service/boil notices in nearly all Central Texas cities/counties, including City of Austin
- City streets and roadways still unsafe to travel
- City Hall telephones and internet remain non-functioning
- City offices remain closed due to lack of utilities and safe travel routes to work for employees
- Waste Management cancels collection services
- Oncor trucks “stuck in the snow”
- No declaration/order from Governor or Bastrop County Judge to open emergency shelter

Staff activity:

- Engaged in immediate communications with Oncor (power service provider at WTP) through their designated local representative regarding WTP power outage:
 - *Oncor expressly acknowledges they are fully aware of downed power line completely disabling WTP that is the sole source of drinking water for all COE customers*
 - *Oncor expressly acknowledges that problem involves a single, downed, 3-phase power line*
 - *At approximately 9:00PM, Oncor notifies staff that trucks “on way to Elgin (to complete repairs got) stuck in the snow” and that Oncor had made the decision to “wait until morning” before making the effort to make the necessary repairs to Elgin/WTP system*
- Continue increased social media messaging on all city platforms
- WTP and WWTP operations maintain 24-hour staffing
- Continued efforts to repair City Hall telephones and internet

Thursday, February 18

Weather conditions: More ice and icy conditions; High temp 33 degrees; Overnight freeze

Operational issues:

- Power outage at Water Treatment Plat continues throughout the day
- Power returns to major portions of the City
- Boil Water Notice still in effect
- Due to lack of drinking water & restroom facilities, temporary ‘warming center’ cannot be opened
- No water service in nearly all Central Texas cities/counties
- City Hall telephones and internet remain non-functioning
- City offices remain closed due to lack of utilities and safe travel routes to work for employees

- Waste Management cancels collection services
- Power at Water Treatment Plant returns at **9:20PM**
- No declaration/order from Governor or Bastrop County Judge to open emergency shelter

Staff activity:

- Continued constant/reoccurring communications throughout the day with Oncor through their designated local representative regarding WTP power outage.
 - *Oncor continues to acknowledge that problem involves (1) a single power line and (2) the entire drinking water supply to all city customers*
- Acquired, delivered, and distributed limited bottled water supply to general public
- Continued increased social media messaging on all city platforms
- Continued efforts to repair City Hall telephones and internet
- WTP immediately begins water production and pumping after power restored
- WTP and WWTP operations maintain 24-hour staffing
- Well No. 14 repaired and back on-line
- Maintenance staff begins identifying and repairing water main breaks
- Utility staff begins responding to customer requests for service related to leaks/service line breaks

Friday, February 19

Weather conditions: New freeze, early morning temp in low 20's; snow/ice began to melt by mid-day

Operational issues:

- Power returns to majority of the City
- Waste Management cancels collection services
- Boil Water Notice still in effect
- City offices remain closed due to lack of utilities and safe travel routes to work for employees
- No water service in nearly all Central Texas cities/counties
- No declaration/order from Governor or Bastrop County Judge to open emergency shelter

Staff activity:

- City Hall telephones and internet service repaired and back on-line, skeleton staff on duty
- Continued social media messaging on all city platforms
- Water production and pumping into system continues non-stop throughout the day
- WTP and WWTP operations maintain 24-hour staffing
- Maintenance staff continues to identify and repair water main breaks
- Utility Billing staff begins 24-hour call taking to process customer requests for service
- Staff begins responding to service calls related to private property leaks or service line breaks
- Well No. 16 repaired and back on-line
- Bottled water supply designated for city public safety and staff distributed in a directed manner through various individuals and community groups to reach those in greatest need

Saturday, February 20

Weather conditions: Morning temp again in 20's, creating another freeze which melted by mid-day

Operational issues:

- No water service in most Central Texas cities/counties
- Boil Water Notice still in effect

Staff activity:

- Water production and pumping into system continues non-stop throughout the day
 - Minimal water service begins to return to portions of the City
 - WTP operations maintain 24-hour staffing
 - Water samples for required TCEQ testing submitted late in the day
 - Interactions with Aqua WSC to discuss scenarios for sharing City's water supply
 - Maintenance staff continues to identify and repair water main breaks
 - Utility Billing staff continues 24-hour call taking to process customer requests for service
 - Staff continues responding to service calls related to private property leaks or service line breaks
 - Continued social media messaging on all city platforms
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Sunday, February 21

Weather conditions: Sunny; High 76 and low 44 degrees

Operational issues:

- No water service in most Central Texas cities/counties
- Boil Water Notice still in effect

Staff activity:

- Water production and pumping into system continues non-stop throughout the day
 - Minimum supply continues, providing some water to entire system and most customers
 - WTP operations maintain 24-hour staffing
 - Maintenance staff continues to identify and repair water main breaks
 - Utility Billing staff continues 24-hour call taking to process customer requests for service
 - Staff continues responding to service calls related to private property leaks or service line breaks
 - Canned drinking water supply received; directed distribution to areas of greatest need continues
 - Positive test results received from TCEQ in late afternoon
 - Continued social media messaging on all city platforms
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Monday, February 22

Weather conditions: Sunny; High 72 and low 42 degrees

Operational issues:

- Full water service restored to system and all COE water customers
 - *At this time, 9 million Texans were still under boil water notices; and an estimated 120,000 Texans still had no water service at all*
- Waste Management returns to routine collection services and schedule

Staff activity:

- Water production and pumping into system continues non-stop throughout the day
- Boil Water Notice lifted; pressure and stabilization of system to function city-wide established
- WTP operations maintain 24-hour staffing
- Maintenance staff continues to identify and repair water main breaks
- Staff continues responding to service calls related to private property leaks or service line breaks
- Continued social media messaging on all city platforms
- Partial bottled drinking water supply from TDEM requested on Tuesday received; continued general distribution to public as needed

Memorandum



Date: March 8, 2021

To: Thomas L. Mattis, City Manager

Subject: Public Information Distribution Extreme
Winter Weather Event

Following is a re-cap of the public information distribution efforts by city operations during the winter weather event effecting the City of Elgin on February 11 through February 26.

All information was provided on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and was posted on the Website in NEWS. All those who signed up for news alerts received these via Email as a Newsflash. Reverse 911 alert messaging was not available for the duration of this event.

On Wednesday February 17, all posts provided for previous days were translated to Spanish and posted. For the remainder the winter weather event, all information shared by city staff was provide in both English and Spanish.

City staff provided seventy-two (**72**) informational posts related to the winter events from February 11 to February 26. Posts ranged in reach from 1,200 to 12,000 recipients.

- **Thursday February 11 (1:40PM)** - First Emergency Weather post referred the community to Bastrop County OEM Page for ongoing updates. **Reach 5,000**
- **Wednesday February 17** - Peak reach for Facebook **17,200**.
- The City Facebook account had an **increased reach of 148% at 55,592** during this event.

Demographics of Facebook & Instagram City of Elgin accounts

- **Facebook - 5,700 followers/likes** 73% women, 27% men: 39% Elgin, 18% Austin, 4% Bastrop and others including McDade, Pflugerville, Round Rock, Taylor, & Lexington,
- **Instagram - 1,200** - 77% women, 23% men; 39% Elgin 15% Austin others including Bastrop, Manor
- **Twitter - 246** followers

Dates of Primary Posts, Comments, Shares

- Monday (2/15) - City shared Bastrop County OEM post Extreme Cold Plan and Action
- Tuesday (2/16) - Elgin Recreation Center does not have water and will not be opened
- Tuesday (2/16) 5:08PM - Water Leaks post at 5:08PM (54 shares/232 comments)
- Wednesday (2/17) 6:28AM - Water treatment plant does not have power (147 shares/113 comments)
- Thursday (2/18) Drinking water available at the Recreation Center (122 shares/109 comments)
- Wednesday (2/24) - Disaster recovery resources (Reach - **5,300**)

Comparing these statistics to the same time period a year ago (February, 2020), Facebook page reach was 3,913 and Instagram 552; posts during this time period had 300 to 1,100 peak in reach; and Instagram reach was 400 to 500 from February 15 through February 23.

Amy Miller
Public Information Officer
Director of Community Services

Requests for Assistance and Directed Distribution of Bottled Water to Those in Greatest Need

Although bottled drinking water was very limited in its availability at the time, city staff was still vigilant in attempting to address all known individuals of greatest need throughout the community once the City's water supply was cut off by power failures (specifically the elderly or those with health and/or transportation issues).

As specific citizen requests for help began on February 18, the Community Services Department and other staff took immediate steps to address these requests as quickly as possible.

Initially, staff had an extremely limited bottled water supply on hand that was utilized to help address the most immediate needs/requests. Following are some examples of the specific correspondence/requests received by staff; **all of which were provided a limited amount of drinking water that was personally delivered to each location by staff:**

February 18-19

- Elizabeth Sullivan 400 N Avenue E for her and neighbor Tammy - elderly and disabled
- Ivory Thomas Hwy 95 South - elderly
- 402 N Avenue A elderly single woman Bonnie Groves
- 815 Savana Cove the Ivey Family – elderly
- “We need drinking water I have 4 people in my house and one child under the age of 6 my address is 14405 little eagle ct elgin TX 78621 please please please.”
- “14401 Little Eagle CT. Elgin 2 children 1 infant and 2 adults Running low on drinking water.”
- “Hello we are in need of water please there are two adults in the household our address is 125 valley run trail Elgin, TX 78621 My phone number is 512-496-0729”
- “We are still without running and drinking water and could really use some help. There are 4 of us in the household. Myself, my daughter and 2 grandsons. Any help you can provide would be appreciated. Thank you! Melinda K. Wilson 1361 Red Town Road”
- “Hello my name is Jeannie Smith. I have 5 household members. Name Jeannie Smith My address is 309 McClendon Dr.”
- “We have 4 adults, including 1 diabetic and 1 pregnant woman & 4 children. My address is 13824 Sierra Wind Ln., Elgin TX 78621. Phone number is 512-915-1179.”
- 501 Stabeno Just me, 1 adult. Would appreciate drinking water to get by on this weekend.

It is important to note that in each one of these cases wherein citizens communicated directly and appropriately with staff regarding their individual situations, we were able to provide – and deliver to them – a limited amount of drinking water.

In addition:

- The Elgin Police Department (EPD) shared from the drinking water supply specifically earmarked for public safety employees and operations. EPD Chief Patrick South made the determination that there was a greater need amongst certain members of the Elgin community for said drinking water – and was able to provide 140 gallons of drinking water through this effort.
- City staff was assisted in the distribution of this water by the Mayor and each member of the City Council, as well as various community outreach groups.
- Utility staff responding to calls for service and EPD Patrol Units also had drinking water to distribute for specific needs.
- Throughout the event, City operations received essentially no calls or requests related medical emergencies or related requests for assistance: the Utility and Public Information offices received no such calls and the EPD received just two (2) - and both were responded to by officers.

Potential Areas for Operational Upgrades

- 1) The easiest, most cost effective “upgrade” the City could achieve to avoid a similar occurrence is to receive **a commitment from Oncor to prioritize the water treatment plant power supply** in such a way as to prevent another 36 consecutive-hour power outage in the future
- 2) Current operations lack the overall **resources** that would be required to have made a more meaningful impact on the operational issues presented by this storm. If there is a desire for City operations to provide a more comprehensive response, a **significant** financial investment would be required to fund a wide range of additional resources, including but not limited to:
 - Independent generators and/or redundant power sources located at all operational areas associated with water pumping, production, and/or storage facilities
 - Independent generators and/or redundant power sources located at all operational areas associated with wastewater collection and treatment
 - Portable generators
 - Snowplows with supporting maintenance vehicles; and a significant annual road salt supply
 - Snow shovels and snow blowers for sidewalks clearing
 - Additional staffing and additional funding in support of maintenance of all listed above
 - A reserve supply of food and water
 - Dramatically upgraded vehicular access both (a) within the respective treatment plant properties and (b) Bastrop County Roads leading to the water treatment plant
- 3) While many citizens get nearly all information from the internet and/or electronic sources, many others do not have immediate access to electronic sources. This event underscored challenges achieving effective **communication** with **all** city residents. Staff strives to recognize this environment and offers nearly all routine communications both electronically and paper/hard copies – as well as maintaining a commitment to Spanish-language translations. Given the impacts of this storm, however, staff was confined to only electronic communications, which obviously did not reach all citizens, every time.
- 4) Opened in 2018, the **City’s Recreation Center** doubles as an **Emergency Shelter** - under certain circumstances. It was built in part through a partnership with Bastrop County and FEMA. The City received a \$1M grant (about 1/3 of the total project costs) in FEMA dollars through Bastrop County in support of the project. In exchange, the City committed to operating an emergency shelter **whenever a disaster declaration is made by the Governor or Bastrop County Judge that includes such an order**. No such order to open the emergency shelter was ever made during this event; and the City was not compelled to open the facility as a shelter or ‘warming center’.

As stated earlier, the consistent/unified directive from the Governor, County Judges, TxDOT, and Emergency Management professionals was to not open emergency shelters – encouraging citizens to stay at home and off roadways for the general safety and welfare of all.

Aside from this specific commitment, however, the Recreation Center is a city-owned and operated facility; that falls completely under the control and management of the City of Elgin. City taxpayers paid for most of that facility as it sits today.

There is a detailed plan for opening and operating the Emergency Shelter under the terms of the City’s agreement with Bastrop County. That plan, however, makes no mention of ‘warming centers’ (a concept totally new to emergency management). Likewise, the City has currently no such plan related to operating an Emergency Shelter separate and apart from Bastrop County.

If there is a desire to develop a methodology whereby the Council could direct the opening of an Emergency Shelter at its discretion, then such an operational plan would need to be developed and adopted for that purpose.



City of Elgin Office of the City Manager

City Hall · 310 North Main Street · P.O. Box 591
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February 22, 2021

The City of Elgin is pleased to announce this morning the restoration of full water service and lifting of the boil water notice caused by the recent winter storm event that affected all city water customers and residents.

It has been reported that 1,300 public water utility operations in Texas have issued Boil Water Notices in response to the impacts of the storm – and only 64 of those drinking water providers have lifted their notices, with the City of Elgin now being one of those. As of this morning, nearly 9 million Texans are still under boil water notices; and is estimated that 120,000 Texans still had no water service at all, including many of our surrounding neighbors.

These numbers only help to illustrate the outstanding work done by city staff in recovering from this never-seen-before event in a relatively quick timeframe. Restoring drinking water to all city customers is a significant accomplishment under these circumstances and is directly attributable to the herculean effort and unwavering commitment of the City's Public Works and Utility maintenance employees.

I want to specifically recognize the work of Assistant Public Works Director Michael Gonzalez and City Engineer Beau Perry from TRC. Their leadership and expertise were crucial to re-righting the ship.

Also worthy of specific thanks and accolades are Water Plant Operators Tony Ledesma and Jorge Villareal who committed long, sleepless nights to this effort. Utility Maintenance staff led by John Clahoun and Streets Maintenance crews led by Joe Parten and Terry Fowler are also to be commended for their efforts. Director of Community Development Amy Miller did an outstanding job keeping the public informed with factual information; and Customer Service Manager Dodie Navejas successfully managed many citizen inquiries and requests for service.

The overall success of our recovery efforts over the last week is due to great teamwork of all city staff and operations – with the full support of the Mayor and City Council. It was also crucial for us to have the support, patience, and understanding of the vast majority of our residents, who recognized that “we were all in it together”; and the City of Elgin was doing all that it reasonably could do to get us back to where we are today.

Thanks again to all.

Thomas L. Mattis
City Manager