

December 20, 2007

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

TO ALL INTERESTED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND PUBLIC GROUPS:

In accordance with the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1500, and the implementing procedures at 40 CFR Part 6 entitled “Procedures for Implementing the Requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality on the National Environmental Policy Act”, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that the following action is eligible for a Categorical Exclusion (CE) and exemption from further environmental review.

Drinking Water Infrastructure Rehabilitation/Construction Project
for the
Wrenwood Subdivision located in the
City of Houston, Harris County, Texas

EPA Project Number: XP-9664650100

Estimated Total EPA Share: \$ 144,300
Estimated Local Share: \$ 1,508,700

BACKGROUND

The City of Houston (City) is located in Harris County, which is in the southeast part of the state approximately 50 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The City was selected to receive Fiscal Year 2005 special Congressional funding support to rehabilitate the drinking water distribution system in the Wrenwood Subdivision (Subdivision) located in the northwest portion of the City at the intersection of Interstate 10 and Beltway 8. The Subdivision has been in existence for more than 50 years, and is completely within the City limits with no additional room to expand. The City first annexed the Subdivision in 1972 and provides wastewater collection service for the residents, but does not currently provide drinking water service to the area. Until approximately 12 months ago, drinking water was supplied to the citizens in the neighborhood by a private drinking water company. At that time, the water utilities company became insolvent and abandoned the water system. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) appointed an operator to take over service, but that company subsequently requested to be released from the responsibility of operating the water system. The TCEQ then placed the abandoned water system under receivership, and assigned a Receiver to serve as an interim water provider for 18 months. The City is now proposing to take over operation of drinking water supply and distribution in the Subdivision at the end of the receivership, at which time the Receiver has agreed to transfer all Subdivision water customers to the City.

The City completed a Workplan for the Wrenwood Safe Water Project detailing the problems with the current water distribution system resulting from lack of maintenance, and the necessity of accomplishing badly needed upgrades before connecting the failed substandard system into the existing City water system. The Workplan delineated the steps necessary to upgrade the Subdivision, and studied the costs and feasibility of completing necessary upgrades and rehabilitation activities in order to be able to provide water of adequate capacity and quality to meet EPA and TCEQ drinking water quality standards. Based upon the results of the Workplan, the City has decided to proceed with the upgrading of the water system in the Subdivision to meet City standards. The funding recipient will use the EPA funds along with local monies to finance the proposed rehabilitation and construction project. The funding recipient has requested that the project be granted a Categorical Exclusion, and be excluded from the full environmental review and assessment requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

_____ Since most of the equipment and distribution lines in the Subdivision are more than 50 years old and have far exceeded their mechanical life expectancy, the City proposes to plug and demolish three water wells and their associated water storage tanks, to replace all aging and leaking distribution lines incapable of adequately accepting the water pressure in the City's existing distribution network, to install backflow prevention and a metering system to measure the quantity of water delivered, to provide all necessary electrical service, and then to eventually hookup the Subdivision's system to the City's existing water system. In addition to not supplying water of acceptable quality for drinking and adequate pressure for firefighting, the more than 50-year old distribution system leaks excessively and has caused major subsidence of the soils in much of the area. These additional problems will be corrected by the replacement of all existing undersized and substandard distribution lines. The City's efforts should provide a safe and reliable source of drinking water to serve the public health and safety needs of the 254 citizens living in the neighborhood.

All project related rehabilitation and construction activities will occur in previously disturbed areas on-site at existing service locations, which are owned or controlled by the funding recipient. No new land will be acquired, and no persons or businesses will be displaced by the rehabilitation and construction activities. The project will not cause an expansion of the City's existing drinking water supply/service area since the Subdivision is fully developed, is entirely within the corporate limits of the City, and, therefore, has no additional room for future growth.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

The proposed project qualifies for a CE. The project is a small-scale, routine action solely directed toward minor rehabilitation of an existing facility and functional replacement of existing equipment. The proposed action will not individually, cumulatively over time, or in

conjunction with any other federal, state, local, or private actions have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and may be exempted from environmental review under NEPA. No adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on cultural resources, endangered and threatened species and their critical habitat, floodplain, wetlands, prime farmlands or aquifer recharge zones were identified. There are no Environmental Justice concerns with the proposed project since all residents in the area will benefit equally from the infrastructure improvements.

APPROVAL

_____The request for the issuance of a CE is approved. This approval will be revoked if at any time the project no longer meets the eligibility for a CE, new evidence determines that significant local or environmental issues exist, or that federal, state, local or tribal laws are being or may be violated by implementation of the project.

Responsible Official,

John Blevins
Director
Compliance Assurance and
Enforcement Division

cc: Bill White, Mayor
City of Houston

Kevin Ward, Executive Administrator
Texas Water Development Board