

CITY OF BLANCO ANNOUNCES HISTORIC MILESTONES FOR MUNICIPAL WATER SUPPLY

By Mayor Mike Arnold
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It's long been considered common knowledge that the City of Blanco had water supply issues. Those days are over.

After a year and a half of hard work on the part of many people, I am pleased to announce today that the City of Blanco's water supply is more plentiful, stable and secure than it's been in our history, and is set up to continue this way for our grandchildren, their children and beyond.

This has been my main focus during my term as Mayor. Our team has accomplished three significant efforts – ending a feud and renegotiating our outdated contract with our water delivery partner, finally bringing our water treatment plant online, and replacing all water meters in town.

The City of Blanco today has full access to turn on the tap and use up to 1200 acre feet of water per year – which is nearly four times more than we currently use, which is about 340 acre feet.

And, where we lost an average of 28% of our water per month due largely to outdated meters, this has now been brought well within acceptable norms.

It is important to note that due to the legal aspects of these efforts, including ongoing mediation and possible litigation, we have not been able to openly discuss these efforts till now.

Pipeline Partnership

Back in the late 1990s, a local man named Jim Roderick succeeded in leading the City to secure water rights from the Guadalupe Blanco River Authority (GBRA), while partnering with what was then a local company to build a pipeline from Canyon Lake, treat our water, and deliver it to us. While this wasn't popular at the time, I think we can all now see the wisdom and are thankful for it.

AT A GLANCE

The City of Blanco is today announcing three historic milestones that ensure water far into the future:

- Renegotiation of water treatment and delivery contract with Texas Water Company, and upgrade of interface system. It was these issues that caused the City's recent water emergencies.
- Completion of the City's Water Treatment Plant upgrade (a 1-year project that stretched more than 5 years).
- All new water meters bring lost water to acceptable levels.

Combined, these ensure availability of 1200 acre feet of clean water per year on demand. The City currently uses only 28% of that amount. Blanco's water supply has never been more plentiful and secure.

So much has changed since then – we’re now in one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Blanco’s needs have changed. That local company sold to a big, nationwide, publicly-traded company, now operating here as Texas Water Company.

The entire basis of our partnership relationship has changed dramatically. Blanco has become an increasingly smaller part of their portfolio. The pipeline infrastructure had to be upgraded. Our technical specifications grew apart. And as a result, our contract became increasingly obsolete. All told, it just wasn’t working great for either of us.

One big issue that came up during this time was who pays for upgrades to the delivery system, of which we own a small stake. Starting in 2015, the Company spent considerable funds to upgrade most of that system, and sent us a bill for our proportional share, total of nearly a million dollars. The old contract is vague on this, and the City officially disputed this claim. It had been a sticking point between us for many years, never resolved and always kicked down the road.

It’s important to note that from the beginning, this pipeline was intended to be our back-up water supply, with the Blanco River being our primary source. Our treatment plant there was terribly outdated, so in 2019 it was taken offline for a complete overhaul. Yes, that was right before COVID and related supply chain issues. That ended up being just one of many issues that have dragged out completion more than 5 years now.

In the meantime, our pipeline from Texas Water Company has served as our sole source of water. When it was a back-up supply, the issues in our technology and contract were never really explored or addressed.

Last July, these issues came to a head for us here in Blanco, as we were forced to declare Stage 6 emergency water rationing. I was informed our City had less than 24 hours of water remaining, dropping fast, and supply was not keeping up. This was serious. We scrambled to stockpile pallets of bottled water and collect lists of shut-ins, among other preparations. Needless to say that was a difficult few days.

What made this all the more upsetting was that we found out this was entirely avoidable. It was not a lack of water. It was instead a direct result of how we’d grown apart from the water company – the deficiencies in our agreement, and our technology differences.

I was told I was the fourth Blanco Mayor to face these issues, which had never been resolved. I determined that the buck would stop with me, and we would not be kicking these issues down the road any more.

Since then, our team has been working very hard to fix these issues. This has not been an easy process. Our respective teams endured three full days of mediation, with countless back-and-forth proposals and counter proposals. Many times it looked like we’d reached an impasse, and the deal might fall through.

In the midst of this, Texas Water Company brought on a new president, Aundrea Williams. She has been a pleasure to work with, and deserves all the credit she can get for this.

Despite the big bumps in the road, neither of us would give up. Today, together, we are formally announcing a new agreement between the City of Blanco and Texas Water Company, which fixes all the underlying issues. It's a fair and favorable deal for all.

Blanco owns 600 acre feet of water rights from GBRA, the delivery of which is the purpose of this relationship. This translates to 540,000 gallons per day. (Our total water usage is considerably less, averaging about 320,000 gallons per day.)

Our new agreement, and the upgrade of our systems, ensures full delivery of this 540,000 gallons per day – far more than we can anticipate using in the foreseeable future. Blanco still retains our partner relationship, with an ownership stake in the TWC delivery system, and their financial claim against us is dropped.

Working through these issues has not only fixed the contract and tech issues, but has led to a friendlier and more cooperative relationship with our partner, Texas Water Company. We look forward to working alongside them to serve the people of Blanco far into the future.

Water Treatment Plant

What started as a one year project in 2019 grew to five years with no end in sight. When I first took office, quite frankly, the outlook was bleak.

Without going into the messy details, it ends up that much of the work that had been done up to that point needed to be ripped out and re-done all over again. Just a couple months ago, the estimate for getting it back online was 450 days.

We never let up on our determination to get our Water Treatment Plant up and running as soon as possible, and also hold the responsible parties to account.

I am excited to announce it is now fully operational. The previous plant served us for more than 60 years. Our newly updated plant is state of the art, and we anticipate it will serve us probably longer than any of us will be alive.

The City has rights to pull up to 600 acre feet per year from the Blanco River (separate from our pipeline supply). This has always been our primary source, and we anticipate switching back to this soon.

Combined, the City now has a full 1200 acre feet available for annual consumption, with fully updated treatment and delivery systems. We currently consume just 28% of this amount.

Water Meters

Up until very recently, the City of Blanco couldn't account for an average of 28% of our water supply per month. A formal audit determined this was not due to leaks or loss, but rather it was not being properly accounted for due to our water meters being well past their lifespan.

A project to replace every meter in town has now been completed. While we don't yet have final numbers, it is certain that this will resolve a majority of our water "loss" and bring it well withing acceptable standards.

Best of all, this was done with a state-backed program, without a penny out of pocket, with the cost guaranteed to be paid for by the amount of water we save.

Looking Forward

It is important to note that we will still face drought restrictions like the rest of the Hill Country. These are normally set by regional water authorities. Blanconians should continue to conserve water like the precious resource that it is.

We are determined not to rest on these accomplishments, and are continuing to aggressively explore avenues to secure additional water sources for the people and businesses of Blanco.

Citizens can expect another very important announcement in the near future that makes all this even more secure.

The City has recently secured a deal and funding through the Texas Water Development Board to replace several of our most troublesome water lines. This will further reduce water loss, and decrease our ongoing maintenance and repair expense.

Combined, these historic milestones ensure that Blanco's faucets will be flowing with plentiful, clean water for our grandchildren, their children, and beyond.

May it never be said again that the City of Blanco has water supply issues.

Contact Mayor Mike Arnold at mayor@cityofblancotx.gov