“The State of the
Norwood Water Commission”
Submitted by Tony Daranyi, acting Chairperson

As we approach the end of the year and adopt the 2027 Norwood Water Commission’s budget, I thought it important to provide information to our customers with a “State of the NWC” summary.

Many of you know me, but for those who don’t, my name is Tony Daranyi. I’m currently the NWC Chairperson, having been a rural member on the Commission since 2023. My wife and I have lived in San Miguel County for over 40 years, and own Indian Ridge Farm on Wrights Mesa.

Mostly, the news to report from the Water Commission is very positive. This is information we’d like to share. Here’s a summary:

• First and most important, our staff at Town Hall and in the field work diligently every day, sometimes around the clock, to deliver safe, reliable drinking water. It is demanding work, and these dedicated professionals deserve a huge “thank you.”

• The NWC has implemented several important policies to sustain our ability to deliver potable water to our 800+ customers through the ongoing serious drought that has gripped the Western US for the past 25 years. Anticipating dry spring and early summer weather conditions in January of this year, we became one of the first towns in Colorado to impose on-going water conservation measures. At the same time, we adopted a new progressive tiered service charge matrix, based on the concept that a customer will pay relatively more per gallon as the usage increases. This has had a two-fold effect: customers have become more conservation-minded, and leaks that were previously undetected at various residences have been identified and repaired, saving the NWC thousands of gallons. Water is our most precious resource here in this semi-arid alpine desert, and every drop is worth conserving.

• Some of our customers participated in last summer’s inaugural Garden-in-a-Box program, which we hope to expand in 2027. For a relatively modest sum of money, customers can plant beautiful drought-tolerant perennial plants — mostly flowers — in their gardens, replacing thirsty grass and other more water-demanding annuals and perennials. (Please contact NWC Administrator Sara Owens for more information.)

• To further conserve water, we encourage customers to replace wasteful sprinklers with drip-line irrigation systems and to install low-flow showerheads and toilets in their bathrooms.

• Rumors and misinformation that we “ran out of water” in 2025 are blatantly false. Unlike many municipalities and water districts on the Western Slope, we’re very fortunate to have *stored* domestic water at the Gurley Reservoir that is then gravity-fed to the

treatment plant's reservoirs. In other words, we don't rely on erratic surface water as our primary source. Through a perpetual lease agreement with Farmers Water, we have available 300 acre-feet of water per year for domestic purposes. We're currently negotiating with Farmers Water for additional water if we exceed that established amount. Historically, we've averaged somewhere between 250-300 acft of usage per year. Indeed, 2025 was an exception, when we asked for, and received from Farmers Water, an extra 11 acft to meet our customer's demands following an exceptionally dry winter and a non-existent summer monsoon season.

• Undoubtedly, our biggest infrastructure challenge is an aged-out, 50-year-old water delivery system. The NWC has worked hard the past five years or so on a "Redundant Water Line" to create a loop system that will make water repairs on the existing mainline (along Colorado 145) easier and less frequent, while reducing the harmful impact current waterline breaks impose on all our customers. The new waterline will also enhance fire-fighting capabilities within the Town of Norwood. This approx. $10 million project is being funded primarily through grant and loan monies, a $1 million contribution from San Miguel County, and $1.25 million through the Congressional Directed Spending program. We're currently accepting tax-deductible donations in a special Infrastructure Account to help fund this project. The project is nearing its construction phase, having completed an Environmental Assessment and 95% completion of Design and Engineering. Once we finalize one last water utility easement with an affected landowner, we hope to break ground in 2027 after putting the project out to bid. For your information, out-of-pocket expenses to-date for the NWC from this large project total less than $70,000.

• The NWC operates with a very lean Operations and Maintenance budget, and I'm pleased to say we maintain a positive cash flow. Capital improvements to maintain the system, budgeted at $250,000 next year, come mainly from our stored reserves setup for this purpose. We are proposing for 2027 a 10% across-the-board rate increase to cover increased operational costs (the budget is scheduled to be formally adopted at another public hearing on Dec. 8, 2026 at 6:30p.m. at Town Hall. We welcome your feedback.).

• Most of our capital reserves (approximately $700,000) are now held in an interest-bearing account that earns about $20,000 per year.

• Of course, we also have our eyes on the future and are working to continue the sustainability and resiliency of our potable water system to ensure that we can always meet the demands of our customers. To this end, we've completed a study on our 5 cfs water right on the San Miguel River and the potential for more reservoir storage at the treatment plant, contributed funding to assess the feasibility of the Straw Dam in Gurley Canyon, analyzed (with Eco-Action Partners, SMPA and the Colorado School of Mines) the potential for floating solar panels on one of the treatment plant's reservoirs, and are participating in the San Miguel Watershed's Wildfire Ready Action Plan to protect our

source water high up in the Lone Cone drainage from the damaging effects of a potential wildfire.

• I would be remiss if I didn't close by mentioning that we have currently have two open seats on the NWC: one for a town representative (appointed by the Town of Norwood) and the other a rural representative (appointed by the San Miguel Water Conservancy District). I have personally found that working with NWC and town staff is very rewarding and a great way to get involved in a positive way with the greater community. If you love water, participating as an NWC member is for you! Your work will make a difference for the long-term resiliency of life as we know it in this beautiful region we call home. Please join us! (In addition to myself, existing Commission members are Ray Cossey, Ryan Howe and Talle Meehan.)

• And keep in mind that all our meetings are open, held the second Tuesday of every month at Town Hall beginning at 6:30 p.m. We look forward to your participation!

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