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APPLICATION OF NORTHTOWN	§	BEFORE THE STATE OFFICE
ACRES WATER SUPPLY FOR	§	I LIN OF LINK
AUTHORITY TO CHANGE RATES	§	ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF

SHEROLL RICHARDSON

ON BEHALF OF

NORTHTOWN ACRES WATER SUPPLY



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I. <u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>

Northtown Acres has not had an increase to its base rates in over a decade. The major
cost drivers for Northtown Acres are the cost of purchasing water from the City of Corsicana;
operating labor, maintenance labor, and administrative labor expense; and the return on and
depreciation of the water system. These three groups of costs make up 82% of Northtown
Acres' cost of service .

The current interim rates generate \$162,795 annually, *an under-recovery of \$129,630*.
Thus, Northtown Acres is not earning sufficient revenues to cover its reasonable expenses,
much less earn a return.

Northtown Acres' cost of service has been steadily increasing over the last decade, with
little to no corresponding increase in revenues. The purpose of this case is to bring the rates
of Northtown Acres into compliance with state law as being sufficient to recover a reasonable
return on invested capital used and useful in excess of the reasonable expenses incurred in
providing service.

15

1 II. INTRODUCTION

2	Q.	PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME,	POSITION, AND BUSINESS ADDRESS.
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A. My name is Sheroll Richardson. I, along with my husband Roger, own, operate and
manage Northtown Acres Water Supply ("Northtown Acres"). My business address is
18770 FM 709 North, Dawson Texas 76639.

6 Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE.

7 A. I have worked for Northtown Acres for more than 30 years.

8 Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE NORTHTOWN ACRES.

- 9 A. Northtown Acres is a small, family-owned Class D water utility that has been serving its
- 10 approximate 150 to 211 customers in the outskirts of Corsicana, Texas, since the 1970s.
- 11 Q. HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED TESTIMONY TO THE PUBLIC
- 12 UTILITY COMMISSION OF TEXAS ("PUCT" OR "COMMISSION")?
- 13 A. I have not.

14 III. PURPOSE OF TESTIMONY

- 15 Q. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TESTIMONY?
- A. The purpose of my testimony is to support Northtown Acres' amended application forauthority to change rates.

18 Q. WHAT IS THE BASIS OF THE NEED FOR A RATE INCREASE?

- 19 A. Northtown Acres has not had an increase to its base rates in over a decade. The major cost
- 20 drivers for Northtown Acres are the cost of purchasing water from the City of Corsicana;
- 21 operating labor, maintenance labor, and administrative labor expense; and the return on
- and depreciation of the water system. These three groups of costs make up 82% of
- 23 Northtown Acres' cost of service as set out below:

		Three Major Cost Categories]
			Cost	% of Cost of Service	-
		Revenue Requirement	\$296,017	100%	-
		Purchased Water	\$95,302	32%	
		Labor	\$78,000	26%	
		Return on/of Investment	\$68,279	23%	
		Total of Three Major Cost Categories	\$241,581	82%	
3					
4		The current interim rates gener	ate \$162,795 annu	ally, <i>an under-recover</i>	y of \$129,630.
5		Thus, Northtown Acres is not ea	rning sufficient revo	enues to cover its reasor	able expenses,
6		much less earn a return.			
7		Northtown Acres' cost of	f service has been s	teadily increasing over t	the last decade,
8		with little to no corresponding increase in revenues.			
9	Q.	HOW IS YOUR TESTIMONY ORGANIZED?			
10	А.	My testimony generally follows the order of issues required in the rate filing package.			
11		Those issues are revenue requirement, expenses, invested capital, and rate design. I will			
12		also address purchased water expense and a pass through for purchased water expense.			
13		Finally, I will address rate case expenses for this proceeding.			
14	IV.	THE REVENUE REQUIREMENT			
15	Q.	WHAT IS NORTHTOWN ACRES TOTAL REVENUE REQUIREMENT?			ENT?
16	A.	Northtown Acres' total annual	revenue requirem	nent is \$296,017. Th	e total annual
17		requirement is netted against oth	her revenues of \$3,5	592, to determine the re	venues needed

1		to be collected through rates, or 292,425, which includes \$95,302 in purchased water
2		expense.
3	Q.	WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS COMPONENTS OF THE REVENUE
4		REQUIREMENT?
5	А.	The various components of the revenue requirement are summarized in Schedule I-1 of the
6		amended rate filing package. They consist of adjusted test year levels of operating
7		expenses, depreciation expense, taxes, and return on investment. I will address each
8		component of the revenue requirement in turn.
9	V.	OPERATING EXPENSE
10	Q.	WHAT IS THE ADJUSTED TEST YEAR LEVEL OF OPERATING EXPENSE
11		REQUESTED FOR RECOVERY?
12	А.	Northtown Acres' total adjusted test year operating expense is set forth on Schedule I-1,
13		line 21, column F. The two cost drivers of Northtown acres' operating expense are the
14		costs of purchased water and contract work.
15	Q.	HOW IS THE COST OF PURCHASED WATER DETERMINED?
16	A.	The cost of purchased water makes up almost half of the operating expense of the utility.
17		Northtown Acres purchases 100% of its water from the City of Corsicana. Northtown
18		Acres used the actual 2019 purchased water expense incurred as the cost of purchased
19		water to be recovered through rates. Northtown Acres purchased water expense is
20		provided in Schedule I-1, line 1, column F in the amended rate filing package.
21		The recovery of purchased water expense is discussed further in the rate design
22		testimony below.

Q. WHAT STEPS DOES NORTHTOWN ACRES TAKE TO MANAGE THE COST OF PURCHASED WATER?

A. Because the cost of purchased water is such a large component of customer bills, we are
very active in monitoring usage to detect potential leaks on the system and promptly
repairing the leaks to avoid excessive purchased water expense. As a result of our
activities, Northtown Acres water loss is less than 7.5%, which I understand is less than
half of what has traditionally been acceptable levels of water loss. The savings to North
Town Acres' customers resulting from these efforts as compared to a utility with 15%
water loss is approximately \$7,147 annually.

10 Q. HOW IS THE COST OF CONTRACT WORK DETERMINED?

A. Northtown Acres, like any utility or business enterprise, incurs labor expense for
 operations, maintenance and administrative activities. Northtown Acres' water operator is
 Roger Richardson, who holds a Class D water operator license. Both Mr. Richardson and
 and I have performed the needed operations, maintenance, and repairs on the system for
 the last decade or more. Currently, we are also in need of the assistance of a part time
 construction and maintenance contract worker to assist in performing routine maintenance,
 repairs, and construction on the system as it ages.

Currently, I perform the administrative functions of the utility including the billing and bookkeeping. We are also in need of the assistance of a part time contract accountant to help develop a capitalization plan for the utility and a method of recording and maintain the books for ongoing capital improvements on the system. As will be discussed later in the testimony, there are neither records of the original costs of the system nor the ongoing capital improvements of the system. As such, we have retained assistance in performing a trending analysis to determine the original costs of the system. However, the trending analysis does not include the ongoing capital improvements made in the system over the years. Thus, as the system is on the back end of the depreciable investment life, a large quantity of the ongoing capital improvements are not reflected in the capital investment used in setting rates. A part time contract accountant is necessary to ensure that ongoing capital expenditures, post-test year, are properly recorded and included in invested capital for future rate recovery for the financial integrity of the utility.

8 Northtown Acres' current rates do not recover sufficient revenues to pay any labor 9 expense. As may be seen in Schedule I-1, Line 7, no test year contract or employee labor 10 was paid. To date, Roger Richardson and I have been operating and maintaining the water 11 system, as well as fulfilling the administrative roles of the utility without pay for our time 12 and efforts. Thus, the ongoing operating labor, maintenance labor, and administrative labor 13 are requested as a known and measurable adjustment to test year expenses. Northtown 14 Acres is requesting a known and measurable change in expense from \$0 to \$78,000 to 15 cover expenses for Roger Richardson and me who have been for the past 20 years operating 16 and maintaining the system and fulfilling the administrative roles of the utility. We also 17 need, and with a revenue increase plan on hiring, part time contractors to assist in the 18 maintenance of the utility as the facilities are ageing. We are also planning on hiring, with 19 an increase in revenues, a part time contract accountant to assist with the administrative 20 accounting of expense and to ensure the proper recordation of ongoing utility investment, 21 which has not been properly accounted for and will not be recovered otherwise, as will be 22 explained below.

1 Northtown Acres is providing workpapers to Schedule I-1 supporting the 2 reasonableness of its requested expenses for these four positions. The Highly Confidential 3 workpapers identify the annual expense for similar contact labor for a similarly sized utility in the same geographic region as Northtown Acres. In order to be competitive, 4 5 Northtown Acres must be able to provide at least a comparable level of compensation.

OTHER OPERATING EXPENSES FOR WHICH 6 **O**. ARE THERE ANY 7 NORTHTOWN ACRES IS REOUESTING A KNOWN AND MEASURABLE 8 CHANGE?

9 Yes. For annual regulatory expenses, Northtown Acres is requesting a total adjusted test A. 10 year amount of \$5,202, which includes a known and measurable increase to test year 11 expense of \$4,000. The annual regulatory expenses are anticipated to increase once final rates are set and Northtown Acres may be able to take advantage of streamlined rate filings 12 13 including Class D rate adjustments and purchased water pass through adjustments. 14 Because Northtown Acres has yet to be able to take advantage of these rate adjustment 15 mechanism, Northtown Acres does not have historical expenses levels and estimated the 16 expense levels necessary to recover the costs of these filings based on past regulatory expense incurred. Northtown Acres has provided in workpapers the back-up support used 17 as the basis of its estimate. 18

19

WHAT ARE THE REMAINING EXPENSES INCLUDED IN OPERATING Q. 20 **EXPENSE AND HOW WERE THEY CALCULATED?**

The remaining expenses sought for inclusion in rates are materials and supplies, 21 Α. transportation expenses, office services and rentals, office supplies and expenses, 22 insurance, lab work and testing and other regulatory expenses. These expenses are all 23

reasonable and based on test year expense levels and the supporting documentation is provided in workpapers to Schedule I-1.

3 Q. WHAT LEVEL OF DEPRECIATION EXPENSE IS BEING REQUESTED?

A. Northtown Acres requests the depreciation expense calculated in accordance with the
formula in the rate filing package for its requested invested capital used and useful in
providing service. The depreciation expense is calculated on Schedule III-3. The known
and measurable adjustments to the test year level of depreciation expense are attributable
to the including in invested capital of the original costs of the water distribution system,
which was previously left out of the rate filing package and is addressed in more detail
below.

11 Q. WHAT ARE NORTHTOWN ACRES' TAXES OTHER THAN INCOME TAXES?

A. Northtown Acres' taxes other than income taxes are calculated on Schedule IV-2 and are
 representative of the grossed-up revenue related taxes that would be incurred at the
 adjusted test year level of revenues.

15 Q. WHAT ARE THE FEDERAL INCOME TAXES AND HOW ARE THEY 16 CALCULATED?

A. Northtown Acres' Federal Income Taxes are calculated on Schedule V based on the
Commission's return method of calculating federal income taxes using a corporate rate of
return of 21%. In the event that the Corporate Federal income tax rate were to be increased
during the pendency of this case, Northtown Acres requests that the calculation of Federal
income taxes reflect the increased corporate tax rate.

1 VI. <u>INVESTED CAPITAL</u>

2 Q. WHAT IS NORTHTOWN ACRE'S REQUESTED TEST-YEAR-END INVESTED 3 CAPITAL?

A. Northtown Acres' requested test-year-end invested capital includes gross investment of
\$985,276, accumulated depreciation of \$590,816, for a net investment of \$364,459.
Northtown Acres' Invested capital is detailed on Schedule III-3 of the rate filing package
and the supporting documentation is provided in workpapers to Schedule III-3. The
original cost of the distribution system is based on a trending analysis, as permitted by the
Commission's rules when the historical cost of investment is unavailable. All other
investment is supported by records of actual cost.

11 Q. WHY IS THE ORIGINAL COST OF THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM BASED ON 12 A TRENDING STUDY?

A. Utilities are permitted to recover a return on and depreciation of the original cost of invested capital in order to recover its costs and be positioned to invest for its future. The financial integrity of a utility depends on the ability to recover its capital costs and a reasonable return. Where the original cost records are not available for a utility, the rules permit a trending analysis to be used to calculate the original cost of the system at the time it was placed in service. Northtown Acres contracted for a trending analysis to be performed in this case and has provided the analysis as a workpaper to Schedule III-3.

20

Q. WHY IS A TRENDING ANALYSIS REQUIRED IN THIS CASE?

A. Northtown Acres financial records do not contain the original cost of invested capital. The
 water utility was originally established by my father, Herb Madison, in the 1970's. Mr.
 Richardson and I have been operating the water utility for many decades and performed

much of the original trenching and assisted in the construction of the system. When my father passed away, I inherited the water utility without any records of original costs of the utility investment and had to rely on the trending study to provide the original cost.

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2

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4 Q. DOES THE TRENDING STUDY PROVIDE AN ACCURATE AMOUNT FOR THE 5 ORIGINAL COST AND INVESTED CAPITAL IN THE DISTRIBUTION 6 SYSTEM?

7 A. Yes, for original cost. Based on my experience in the cost of materials and labor involved, 8 as well as my knowledge of the Northtown Acres' water system and its development over 9 the years, the trending study provides an accurate amount for the original cost of the 10 system. However, the invested capital, based on the trended original cost of investment is 11 very conservative in favor of customers as it does not include any of the annual capital 12 improvements made over the several decades that the system has been in service. In order 13 to limit the amount of issues in this case, we have limited the requested recovery to the 14 original cost of the distribution system as calculated in the trending study and request that 15 the Commission recognize that the amount requested is more than reasonable given that 16 much of the investment is near the end of its depreciable life and contains multiple capital 17 improvements over the years that are not reflected in the cost of service.

Q. GOING FORWARD, HOW DOES NORTHTOWN ACRES PROPOSE TO ACCOUNT FOR THE INVESTED CAPITAL AND ONGOING CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN AND REPLACE THE WATER SYSTEM?

A. Northtown Acres requests that the Commission determine the reasonable and necessary
 and used and useful invested capital in this case as the amounts included in Schedule III-

As stated above, Northtown Acres is also requesting an increase in operating expense
 to be able to retain a part time contract accountant to assist with developing a capitalization
 policy and ensuring that any capital investments or improvements incurred subsequent to
 the test-year-end are properly recorded and included in rate base to be requested for
 recovery in future rate cases.

6 VII. COST OF CAPITAL

7 Q. WHAT IS NORTHTOWN ACRE'S REQUESTED COST OF CAPITAL?

8 A. Northtown Acres' requests an overall cost of capital of 9.04% based on a proposed
9 regulatory capital structure of 40% debt and 60% equity, a cost of debt of 5.04%, and a
10 cost of equity of 11.71%. Northtown Acres' requested cost of capital is calculated on
11 Schedule III-1.

12 Q. WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR NORTHTOWN ACRES' PROPOSED OVERALL
13 COST OF CAPITAL?

14 A. Northtown Acres' proposed overall cost of capital is based in large part on the real-world
 15 risks of small water utilities such as Northtown Acres and on Commission precedent.

16 Q. WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THE REQUESTED CAPITAL STRUCTURE?

A. Northtown Acres' actual capital structure is consistently 100% equity, excluding short term
debt. As a small utility, Northtown Acres incurs a great deal of business and regulatory
risk in providing service to its customers. With the regulatory cost involved in increasing
rates, any needed increase in revenues could easily be outpaced from the customers'
perspective just for the incurrence of rate case expenses. And, as borne out by this
proceeding alone, any needed increase in rates may take multiple years to realize. For
multiple years, Northtown Acres has been unable to recover a reasonable level of expense,

1 much less any return on investment. If Northtown Acres had any material level of debt, it 2 would be in risk of default given the degree of revenue shortfall and the time in which it 3 takes to adjust rates. Under these operating conditions, in my opinion, a small utility could 4 not survive with any material level of debt. In my opinion, the capital structure of 5 Northtown Acres should be the actual capital structure of 100% equity to reflect the risk 6 involved in operating and the recovery of revenues. The requested regulatory capital 7 structure of 40% debt is requested solely to comply with the rate filing package requirement 8 that seems to state that debt may not be less than 40% of the capital structure.

9

Q. WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THE REQUESTED COST OF DEBT?

A. As previously stated, Northtown Acres does not have long-term debt. Northtown Acres'
 proposed cost of debt is based the industry cost of debt recommended by Staff and
 approved by the Commission in recent water utility cases.

13 Q. WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THE REQUESTED RETURN ON EQUITY?

14 A. The requested return on equity was not updated in the amended application and still reflects 15 the rate of return calculated according to the method accepted by the rate filing package in 16 effect when this case was originally filed. I understand that the cost of equity is a subjective 17 issue. As such, Northtown Acres' requests that the cost of equity originally requested and 18 supported by the then effective rate filing package be approved in recognition of the 19 business and regulatory risk of the utility as described above with respect to the capital 20 structure. In the alternative, if the cost of equity contemplated by the original rate filing 21 package instructions is not approved to account for Northtown Acres' business and 22 regulatory risks, Northtown Acres requests that the capital structure contemplated by the 23 rate filing package instructions also be modified so that Northtown Acres may recover the

cost of capital based on its actual capital structure and risk profile. Northtown Acres also
 specifically reserves the right to provide expert testimony on cost of capital in the event
 any party seeks to contest the issue.

4 VIII. <u>RATE DESIGN</u>

5

Q. WHAT IS NORTHTOWN ACRES PROPOSING FOR RATE DESIGN?

A. Northtown Acres' proposed rate design is provided in Schedule VI-2. The rate design is
accomplished by setting the customer charge for a 5/8" meter at \$35.00. The customer
charges for larger meters are increased by a set factor depending on the size of the meter.
The remaining revenues not recovered through the customer charges are recovered through
volumetric rates. Schedule VI-1 is provided only to show the allocation of costs to fixed
and variable under a traditional allocation method.

12 Q. WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS ALLOCATION METHOD?

A. In my experience, the customers prefer a lower fixed customer charge. If the cost allocation between fixed and variable charges shown in Schedule VI-1 were reflected in rates in Schedule VI-2, the customer charge would be much higher.

16 IX. PURCHASED WATER PASS THROUGH

17 Q. PLEASE SUMMARIZE YOUR DIRECT TESTIMONY.

A. Purchased water expense is, by far, the largest expense of Northtown Acres. Northtown
 Acres purchases its water from the City of Corsicana and delivers it to its customers on the
 Northtown Acres water system. Northtown Acres proposes to include the purchased water
 costs in base rates.

In order to permit Northtown Acres to expeditiously file and recover increases in the cost of purchased water, Northtown Acres proposes that the below pass-through

1formula be approved and included in its tariff. Northtown Acres proposes a simplified pass2through formula that is similar to multiple approved formulas and the formula Northtown3Acres is accustomed to using. The initial pass through rate would be \$0. The proposed4formula would permit Northtown Acres to request a pass-through surcharge solely for the5incremental increase in rates charged by the City of Corsicana in its third-tier rate, which6is currently \$4.15 per 1000 gallons. Northtown Acres proposed pass through formula is7set out below:

8

	Proposed Pass Thro	ugh Calculation	······································
	Description	Constant	Variable
1	Corsicana Tier 3 Volumetric Rate 2019	\$4.15	
2	Corsicana Tier 3 Volumetric Rate 20XX	\$X	Yes
3	Incremental Rate (Line 2 - Line 1)	Calculated	
4	20XX Line Loss %	Y%	
5	Pass Through Rate	Calculated	
	Line 5= Line 3 * (1/(1- Line 4	4))	

9

10 Where line losses are calculated as follows:

-	Pass Through Line Loss Calculation		
	Description	Constant	Variable
1	Corsicana Volumes Purchased 20XX	XX gallons	Yes
2	Volumes Built into Base Rates	600,000	
3	Adj'd Purchased Volumes (Ln. 1- Ln. 2)	Calculated	
4	Northtown Metered Volumes 20XX	YY gallons	Yes
5	20XX Line Loss Volumes (Line	Calculated	
6	Northtown Metered Volumes 20XX	Y% Calculated	

If Corsicana were to raise its third tier rates today to go into effect next month, Northtown Acres pass through rate would be calculated using 1) the new tier 3 rate approved by the City of Corsicana, 2) the annual volumes purchased from the City of Corsicana for the last year, and 3) the volumes sold by Northtown Acres to customers for the last year.

Northtown Acres has been in discussions with Commission Staff, who may have a
different recommendation on the pass-through formula. Northtown Acres proposes the
above formula as the most effective at the least administrative expense to implement, for
the benefit of both Northtown Acres and its customers. Northtown Acres has also provided
a schedule calculating the pass through consistent with Staff's proposal. Both proposals
were included within the notice provided in this case.

13 Q. DOES ONE METHOD OF RECOVERY RESULT IN GREATER RATES OR 14 REVENUES FOR NORTHTOWN ACRES?

15 A. No. Both methods of rate recovery produce the same rates for customers. The only 16 difference will be that one requires a separate surcharge while the other is built into the 17 volumetric rates.

18

2 X. <u>RATE CASE EXPENSES</u>

3 Q. IS NORTHTOWN ACRES PROPOSING THE RECOVERY OF RATE CASE 4 EXPENSES IN THIS PROCEEDING?

A. Yes. Northtown Acres requests that the Commission approve the reasonable rate case
expenses incurred by Northtown Acres in this proceeding. Northtown Acres has made
every attempt to maintain rate case expenses at a minimum, for the benefit of its customers,
and is not seeking recovery of hourly attorney's fees. Northtown Acres is seeking recovery
of expenses and contract work incurred in the processing of this case. Northtown Acres
will provide updated rate case expense data with rebuttal testimony or in subsequent filings.

11 Q. HOW DO YOU PROPOSE THAT NORTHTOWN ACRES RECOVER THE RATE

12 CASE EXPENSES INCURRED?

A. Rate case expenses incurred for this proceeding should be recovered through a surcharge
to customers in addition to the proposed base charge, volumetric rates, and pass through.
The recovery of rate case expenses incurred in this proceeding should be incremental to
the known and measurable annual regulatory expense requested fro recovery though rates
as they are the expenses that are apt to prevail into the future, whereas the amount of rate
case expenses to be included in the surcharge are the expenses actually on a historical basis,
which are not recovered through rates.

20 X. <u>CONCLUSION</u>

21 Q. PLEASE SUMMARIZE YOUR DIRECT TESTIMONY.

A. Northtown Acres requests a rate increase to cover the increases in the cost of service
 incurred over the last decade. Specifically, Northtown Acres requests:

1 2		• Approval of its operating expenses, including contract labor expenses, which Northtown acres has not been able to pay;
3		• Approval of Northtown Acres' proposed depreciation and tax expense;
4		• A rate base determination of its invested capital used and useful in providing
5		service;
6		• Approval of Northtown Acres proposed cost allocation and rate deign including
7		the purchased water pass-through; and
8		• Recovery of reasonable rate case expenses.
9		
10	Q.	DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR DIRECT TESTIMONY?
11	A.	Yes, it does.

AFFIDAVIT

STATE OF __Texas_____ §
§
COUNTY OF Navarro____§

BEFORE ME, the undersigned notary public, this day personally appeared Sheroll Richardson to me known, who being duly sworn according to law, deposes and says:

"My name is Sheroll Richardson. I am of legal age and a resident of the State of Texas. I certify that the foregoing testimony and exhibits are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief."

Kichurdson

Subscribed and sworn to before me, notary public, on this the 12 day of M_{ay} , 2021.

Notary Public in and for the State of

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