

Brooke T. Paup, *Chairwoman*
Bobby Janecka, *Commissioner*
Catarina R. Gonzales, *Commissioner*
Kelly Keel, *Executive Director*



Garrett T. Arthur, *Public Interest Counsel*

TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Protecting Texas by Reducing and Preventing Pollution

January 31, 2025

Laurie Gharis, Chief Clerk
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Office of the Chief Clerk (MC-105)
P.O. Box 13087
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

RE: **IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION FOR CREATION OF NORTH
FORK MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT OF WILLIAMSON COUNTY
TCEQ DOCKET NO. 2025-0082-DIS**

Dear Ms. Gharis:

Enclosed for filing is the Office of Public Interest Counsel's Response to Hearing Request in the above-entitled matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Jamison".

Jennifer Jamison, Attorney
Assistant Public Interest Counsel

cc: Mailing List

DOCKET NO. 2025-0082-DIS

PETITION FOR THE CREATION
OF NORTH FORK MUNICIPAL
UTILITY DISTRICT OF
WILLIAMSON COUNTY

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BEFORE THE
TEXAS COMMISSION ON
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

OFFICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST COUNSEL'S
RESPONSE TO HEARING REQUEST

To the Members of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality:

The Office of Public Interest Counsel (OPIC) of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ or the Commission) files this Response to Hearing Request in the above-entitled matter.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Summary of Position

The Commission received a request for a contested case hearing from Edward C. Griffith Jr. on behalf of Wilson Springs Prairie, LP regarding the application for the creation of North Fork Municipal Utility District of Williamson County (North Fork MUD or District). For the reasons discussed herein, OPIC respectfully recommends that the Commission grant the hearing request of Wilson Springs Prairie, LP.

B. Background

North Fork MUD (Petitioner) filed a petition for the creation of North Fork Municipal Utility District of Williamson County with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality pursuant to Article XVI, Section 59 of the Texas Constitution; Chapters 49 and 54 of the Texas Water Code (TWC); Title 30 of the

Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Chapter 293; and the procedural rules of the TCEQ. The petition states that: (1) the Petitioner holds title to a majority in value of the land in the proposed District; (2) there are no lienholders on the property to be included in the proposed District; (3) the proposed District will contain approximately 343 acres situated in Williamson County; and (4) all of the land within the proposed District is located outside the corporate boundaries and extraterritorial jurisdiction of any municipality.

The application was declared administratively complete on July 3, 2024, and the Notice of District Petition was published on August 25, 2024. According to the notice, the proposed District will: (1) construct, maintain, and operate a waterworks system, including the purchase and sale of water for domestic and commercial purposes; (2) construct, maintain, and operate a wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal system for domestic and commercial purposes; (3) construct, install, maintain, purchase, and operate drainage and roadway facilities and improvements; and (4) construct, install, maintain, purchase, and operate facilities, systems, plants, and enterprises as shall be consonant with all of the purposes for which the proposed District is created.

The comment period ended on September 24, 2024.

II. APPLICABLE LAW

A municipal utility district may be created under and subject to the authority, conditions, and restrictions of Article XVI, Section 59, of the Texas Constitution. Chapters 49 and 54 of the TWC and the Commission's

administrative rules found at Title 30, Chapter 293, of the TAC govern petitions to create a MUD. A district shall be created for the following purposes:

- (1) the control, storage, preservation, and distribution of its storm water and floodwater, the water of its rivers and streams for irrigation, power, and all other useful purposes;
- (2) the reclamation and irrigation of its arid, semiarid, and other land needing irrigation;
- (3) the reclamation and drainage of its overflowed land and other land needing drainage;
- (4) the conservation and development of its forests, water, and hydroelectric power;
- (5) the navigation of its inland and coastal water;
- (6) the control, abatement, and change of any shortage or harmful excess of water;
- (7) the protection, preservation, and restoration of the purity and sanitary condition of water within the state; and
- (8) the preservation of all natural resources of the state.

TWC § 54.012.

To create a MUD, a petition requesting creation shall be filed with the Commission. TWC § 54.014. The petition shall be signed by a majority in value of the holders of title of the land within the proposed district, as indicated by the tax rolls of the central appraisal district. *Id.* Among other things, the petition shall: (1) describe the boundaries of the proposed district by metes and bounds or by lot and block number; (2) state the general nature of the work proposed to be done, the necessity for the work, and the cost of the project as then estimated by those filing the petition; and (3) include a name of the district which shall be generally descriptive of the locale of the district. TWC § 54.015. *See also* 30 TAC § 293.11(a) and (d).

If all of the district is proposed to be located outside corporate limits of a municipality, the commissioners court of the county in which the district is to be

located may review the petition for creation and other evidence and information relating to the proposed district that the commissioners consider necessary. TWC § 54.0161(a). If the commissioners court votes to make a recommendation to the Commission, the commissioners court shall submit to the Commission, at least 10 days before the date set for the hearing on the petition, a written opinion stating whether or not the county would recommend the creation of the proposed district and stating any findings, conclusions, and other information that the commissioners court thinks would assist the Commission in making a final determination on the petition. TWC § 54.0161(b). The Commission shall consider the written opinion submitted by the county commissioners. TWC § 54.0161(c).

The Commission shall grant the petition if it conforms to the requirements of § 54.015 and the project is feasible, practicable, necessary, and further, would be a benefit to the land to be included in the district. TWC § 54.021(a). In determining if the project is feasible, practicable, necessary, and beneficial to the land included in the district, the Commission shall consider:

- (1) the availability of comparable service from other systems, including but not limited to water districts, municipalities, and regional authorities;
- (2) the reasonableness of projected construction costs, tax rates, and water and sewer rates; and
- (3) whether or not the district and its system and subsequent development within the district will have an unreasonable effect on the following:
 - (A) land elevation;
 - (B) subsidence;
 - (C) groundwater level within the region;
 - (D) recharge capability of a groundwater source;
 - (E) natural run-off rates and drainage;

- (F) water quality; and
- (G) total tax assessments on all land located within a district.

TWC § 54.021(b).

If the Commission finds that not all of the land proposed to be included in the district will be benefited by the creation of the district, it shall exclude all land not benefited and redefine the proposed district's boundaries accordingly.

TWC § 54.021(c). If the petition does not conform to the requirements of TWC § 54.015 or the project is not feasible, practicable, necessary, or a benefit to the land in the district, the Commission shall deny the petition. TWC § 54.021(d). The rights, powers, privileges, authority, and functions of a district shall be subject to the continuing right of supervision by the Commission. TWC § 54.024.

The applicant must publish notice of the petition to create a district once a week for two consecutive weeks in a newspaper regularly published or circulated in the county where the district is proposed to be located not later than the 30th day before the date of the Commission's decision on the application. TWC §§ 49.011(b) and 54.018. Additionally, the applicant must post notice of the petition on the bulletin board used for posting legal notices in each county in which all or part of the proposed district is to be located. 30 TAC § 293.12(b)(2). The Commission shall hold a public hearing if requested by the Commission, Executive Director, or an "affected person" under the factors in 30 TAC, Chapter 55. TWC § 49.011(c). *See also* 30 TAC § 55.250 (applying rules governing contested case hearings to applications declared administratively complete after September 1, 1999). Affected persons must file their hearing

requests during the 30 days following the final notice publication date. TWC § 49.011(c); 30 TAC § 293.12(c).

A hearing requestor must make the request in writing within the time period specified in the notice and identify the requestor's personal justiciable interest affected by the application, specifically explaining the "requestor's location and distance relative to the activity that is the subject of the application and how and why the requestor believes he or she will be affected by the activity in a manner not common to members of the general public." 30 TAC § 55.251(b)-(d).

An affected person is "one who has a personal justiciable interest related to a legal right, duty, privilege, power, or economic interest affected by the application. An interest common to members of the general public does not qualify as a personal justiciable interest." 30 TAC § 55.256(a). Relevant factors to be considered in determining whether a person is affected include, but are not limited to:

- (1) whether the interest claimed is one protected by the law under which the application will be considered;
- (2) distance restrictions or other limitations imposed by law on the affected interest;
- (3) whether a reasonable relationship exists between the interest claimed and the activity regulated;
- (4) likely impact of the regulated activity on the health, safety, and use of property of the person;
- (5) likely impact of the regulated activity on use of the impacted natural resource by the person; and
- (6) for governmental entities, their statutory authority over or interest in the issues relevant to the application.

30 TAC § 55.256(c).

The Commission shall grant a request for a contested case hearing if: (1)

the request is made by the applicant or the ED; or (2) the request is made by an affected person, complies with the requirements of § 55.251, is timely filed with the chief clerk, and is made pursuant to a right to hearing authorized by law. 30 TAC § 55.255(b).

III. ANALYSIS OF HEARING REQUEST

Edward C. Griffith Jr. submitted a timely combined comment and hearing request on September 16, 2024, acting as the managing member of Griffith Prairie Management LLC, the general partner of Wilson Springs Prairie, LP. (Wilson Springs Prairie). In its request, Wilson Springs Prairie does not provide a precise address, but rather, requestor offers a description of its property's location relative to the boundaries of the proposed North Fork MUD. Specifically, Wilson Springs Prairie states that it owns approximately 305 acres located immediately east of the boundary of the proposed North Fork MUD, and that the North Fork of Mustang Creek traverses both North Fork's property and requestor's property. Section 55.251(c)(1) of the TCEQ rules states that a hearing request must substantially comply with the requirement to give the name, address, and daytime telephone number of the person who files the request. 30 TAC § 55.251(c)(1). While OPIC acknowledges that the P.O. box provided by Wilson Springs Prairie, when viewed in isolation, may not comply with all requirements of 30 TAC § 55.251(c)(1), OPIC finds that the context provided in the written hearing request regarding the precise location of Wilson Springs Prairie's property relative to the proposed MUD boundary is enough to satisfy the substantial compliance requirement of the rule. We also recognize that it may

not be possible to identify a 300-acre tract with a single-point street address. The hearing request further states that Wilson Springs Prairie's chief concerns regarding the creation of the North Fork MUD include wastewater discharge and increased storm water runoff that may impact natural stream flows and water quality of the North Fork of Mustang Creek traversing requestor's property. These concerns are relevant and material to the Commission's decision regarding a MUD creation and thus appropriate for referral to the State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH). *See* TWC § 54.021(b)(3).

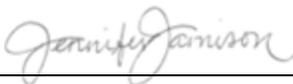
Given the relevance of its concerns regarding water quality and runoff, when combined with the close proximity to the proposed District boundary, OPIC finds that Wilson Springs Prairie, LP has a personal justiciable interest in this matter which is not common to the general public. Also, the requestor's concerns are interests protected by the law under which this application will be considered, and a reasonable relationship exists between those interests and the regulation of a municipal utility district. Finally, the location of the requestor's property increases the likelihood of impacts to health, safety, and use of its property. Therefore, OPIC finds that Wilson Springs Prairie, LP qualifies as an affected person.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, OPIC respectfully recommends the Commission find that Wilson Springs Prairie, LP qualifies as an affected person, grant its hearing request, and refer the matter to SOAH for a contested case hearing.

Respectfully submitted,

Garrett T. Arthur
Public Interest Counsel

By:  _____

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on January 31, 2025, the original of the Office of Public Interest Counsel's Response to Request for Hearing was filed with the Chief Clerk of the TCEQ and a copy was served on all persons listed on the attached mailing list via electronic mail, and/or by deposit in the U.S. Mail.

 _____
Jennifer A. Jamison

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TCEQ DOCKET NO. 2025-0082-DIS**

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