

**THE CITY OF OKLAHOMA CITY
OFFICE OF
THE MUNICIPAL COUNSELOR**

Council Agenda
Item No. IX. BZ
5/20/2025

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Kenneth Jordan
Municipal Counselor

Resolution authorizing the Municipal Counselor to waive service of process and to confess judgment without admission of liability in the amount of \$766 and all the costs of the action in the Oklahoma County District Court in the claim filed by Jon Womastek. Ward 2.

Claimant's address:
6325 Avalon Lane
Oklahoma City, OK 73118

This office acknowledges receipt of a claim from the above-referenced claimant in which claimant alleges a water main break occurred on November 30, 2024, near a duplex he owns at 1508 and 1510 Duffner Drive. Claimant alleges that during the subsequent repairs made by City employees to the line, sand and dirt was permitted to enter the line and he suffered damage to two hot water heaters and some plumbing components. Damages are alleged in the amount of \$1,532. After negotiation, the Municipal Counselor's Office has agreed to recommend, and the claimant has agreed to accept, \$766 as full and final settlement. This amount is supported by documentation.

Section 153(A) of the Governmental Tort Claims Act provides:

- A. The state or a political subdivision shall be liable for loss resulting from its torts or the torts of its employees acting within the scope of their employment subject to the limitations and exceptions specified in The Governmental Tort Claims Act and only where the state or political subdivision, if a private person or entity, would be liable for money damages under the laws of this state. The state or a political subdivision shall not be liable under the provisions of The Governmental Tort Claims Act for any act or omission of an employee acting outside the scope of the employee's employment.

51 O.S. 2023 Supp. §153(A).

According to the Oklahoma Supreme Court, a prima facie case of negligence is established by showing the following: "(1) a duty owed by the defendant to protect the plaintiff from injury, (2) a failure to properly exercise or perform that duty and (3) the plaintiff's injuries are proximately caused by the defendant's failure to exercise his duty of care." *McKellips v. Saint Francis Hospital, Inc.*, 741 P.2d 467, 470 (Okla. 1987) (citations omitted).

Proximate cause has two components - legal causation and cause in fact. *Id.* Cause in fact is determined by the "but for" test: "The defendant's conduct is a cause of the event if the event would not have occurred but for that conduct." *Id.* (citations omitted). "Proximate cause" is also a synonym for "legal cause." BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY, 804 (6th Ed. 1990). To clarify this issue, the Oklahoma Supreme Court has further defined proximate cause: "The proximate cause of an event must be that which in a natural and continuous sequence, unbroken by an independent cause, produces the event and without which the event would not have occurred." *Gaines v. Providence Apartments*, 750 P.2d 125, 126-27 (Okla. 1987) (citations omitted).

A City is not an insurer of its water mains. *City of Muskogee v. Turner*, 98 P.2d 1095, 1097 (Okla. 1940). Nevertheless, if it fails to remedy a rupture after notice thereof, and simply, by its inaction, permits continuance of resultant damage to private property, it is guilty of negligence. *City of Muskogee v. Turner*, 98 P.2d 1095, 1097 (Okla. 1940). Additionally, a City is liable for loss resulting from its torts or the torts of its employees acting within the scope of their employment. 51 O.S. 2023 Supp. §153(A).

The office is in receipt of information from the Line Maintenance Division of the Utilities Department regarding this incident. This information indicates that while there was no history of maintenance issues with this water main section and City personnel timely responded to this weekend call, City personnel was on scene for over an hour and forty minutes before valves were closed.

Based on the above information and applicable Oklahoma law, it is the opinion of this office that this claim should be approved, and that the Municipal Counselor should be authorized to Confess Judgment without admission of liability in the amount of \$766 and all costs of the action in the District Court. If Council agrees, a Resolution to that effect has been prepared.

CJH