

NEWS

Millions of gallons wasted as water pours through Government Hill. No one agrees why.

The latest proposed solution is a \$900,000 fix, with the city responsible for \$360,000 to get the water off the neighborhood's streets.

By **Liz Teitz**, Staff Writer
April 10, 2026

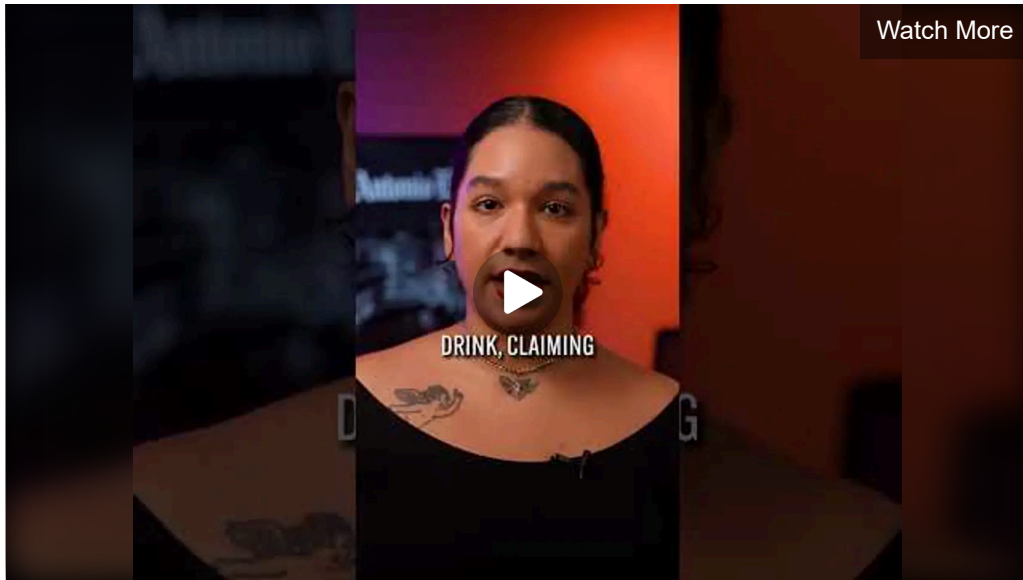
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A person hops over a puddle at East Carson Street and North Palmetto Avenue in San Antonio's Government Hill neighborhood on April 1. Water has been seeping from a nearby property for months, drawing complaints from residents. The project's developer, the city and San Antonio Water System are at odds over the source of the water and who is responsible for addressing the issue.
Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

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The water leaves the parking garage, flowing west on Quitman Street, pooling on the street below the curb.



It takes a left on Spofford, then a right on Carson, flowing downhill and catching leaves, trash and debris along the curb.

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It's been this way for months: Up to 30,000 gallons of water each day running over the Government Hill streets, San Antonio Water System officials say, all pumped out from the garage at Residences at Grayson Heights, a new apartment complex near Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston.

Neighbors are growing increasingly frustrated after more than a year of filing complaints and holding meetings without results.

Officials from the city and San Antonio Water System have been aware of the problem for months and have met repeatedly with the building's owner. They've discussed temporary and permanent solutions — one of which would cost the city \$360,000 and the developer another \$540,000 — but they still haven't reached an actual agreement on how to move forward.

They also haven't been able to agree on where the water is coming from or who should be responsible for getting it off the streets.



Water flows onto the road near the Residences at Grayson Heights parking garage on Quitman Street on April 1. The water has been seeping from the property for months. The project's developer, the city and San Antonio Water System are at odds over the source of the water and who is responsible for addressing the issue.

Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

In the meantime, millions of gallons of water have poured over the pavement, wasted amid the ongoing drought.

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Dispute over water source

Everyone involved agrees on this: The water is entering the street from the garage at Residences at Grayson Heights, a 281-unit complex that opened in 2025.

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The project was built on formerly empty lots between Quitman and East Carson streets, alongside new retail and office spaces also built by a group of investors and developers led by JJ Feik. The development received \$2.1 million from the Inner City Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, a funding mechanism that uses taxes collected within a dedicated zone to reimburse developers for public improvements.

Feik, a member of the ownership group, called the development “a major lift and improvement in that neighborhood, the most significant one since the (Fort Sam) gates closed after 9/11.” The project included more than \$4 million in work on streets, sidewalks, landscaping and other infrastructure, he said.

The project also included a parking garage designed to serve both the new apartments and an adjacent office building. That required going one story below ground, or 12 to 16 feet, he said.

Feik said that throughout the engineering process, his team never encountered groundwater until about 30 feet below the surface.

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During excavation and construction, “we did see some water in the pit,” he said, but there was rain at the time and “we couldn’t attribute that to rain or groundwater.”

Feik said the garage was designed with a drainage system to collect rainfall and discharge it to the street, and that the city and SAWS approved all the necessary engineering.

But in early 2025, when construction was done and the project received its certificate of occupancy, there was more water flowing from the drainage system than expected.



A steady stream of water snakes down Quitman Street, outside of the Residences at Grayson Heights, in San Antonio's Government Hill neighborhood on Wednesday evening, April 1, 2026.

Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

Feik said he thought there was a leak in the building's water system, such as a burst pipe, but "that didn't turn out to be the case." He hired an expert to test the water, who determined that it had "characteristics of treated water," Feik said, so he contacted SAWS.

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That expert was DJ Seeger, CEO of water management and irrigation company Seeger Water. He said the average daily flow is 10,000 to 12,000 gallons, not 30,000, though the flow reached as high as 50,000 gallons last summer during heavy rain.

Seeger said the water flowing from the property is “definitely treated water,” citing test results that he said shows the total dissolved solids, or salts and other substances, as well as fluoride in the water.

“It’s frustrating that they (SAWS) keep saying it’s not their water, because it is,” Seeger said.

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Dueling water tests

But SAWS, which is owned by the city and provides water and wastewater services, insists that is not the case. Officials with the utility say they have conducted months of extensive testing to determine that the water isn’t coming from SAWS’ pipes.

“We categorically do not think this is water from our system,” said Donovan Burton, the utility’s senior vice president of water resources and governmental relations. To determine that, SAWS used acoustic equipment and data loggers, looked at system usage data and satellite data and also conducted chemical testing of the water, he said.

Burton said SAWS' testing showed that the water didn't match either the utility's drinkable water or its recycled water, which is treated wastewater used for non-drinking purposes. Results provided by the utility show differences between the seepage water and SAWS' water for chloride, nitrate, sulfate and other minerals and elements.

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The utility also temporarily shut down a pipe carrying recycled water on Fort Sam to ensure it wasn't leaking, he said, but the flow from the garage continued.

The military base "did a similar evaluation of its water" and also found it didn't match, SAWS said.

After all the testing, SAWS says it has determined the water is shallow groundwater.

While the Edwards Aquifer is the San Antonio area's most well-known and prolific source of groundwater, it's not the only formation that holds water below the surface.

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The Edwards Aquifer Authority, a groundwater district that manages the aquifer in the San Antonio area, said “it has been determined that the water flow does not originate from the Edwards Aquifer.” The agency, which was informed about the issues in September, determined the elevation of the site was too high to be an artesian spring from the Edwards.

“As the source is not associated with the Edwards Aquifer, further investigation falls outside the normal scope of the EAA’s responsibilities,” the aquifer authority said. “The matter has been therefore appropriately forwarded to the city of San Antonio for further investigation.”

SAWS says satellite photos show water surfacing from the empty lot before construction began, indicating a known groundwater issue there before the garage was built.

Feik and Seeger maintain that their tests indicate the flow is related to SAWS' infrastructure.

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“I really don’t know what to believe from SAWS,” Feik said.

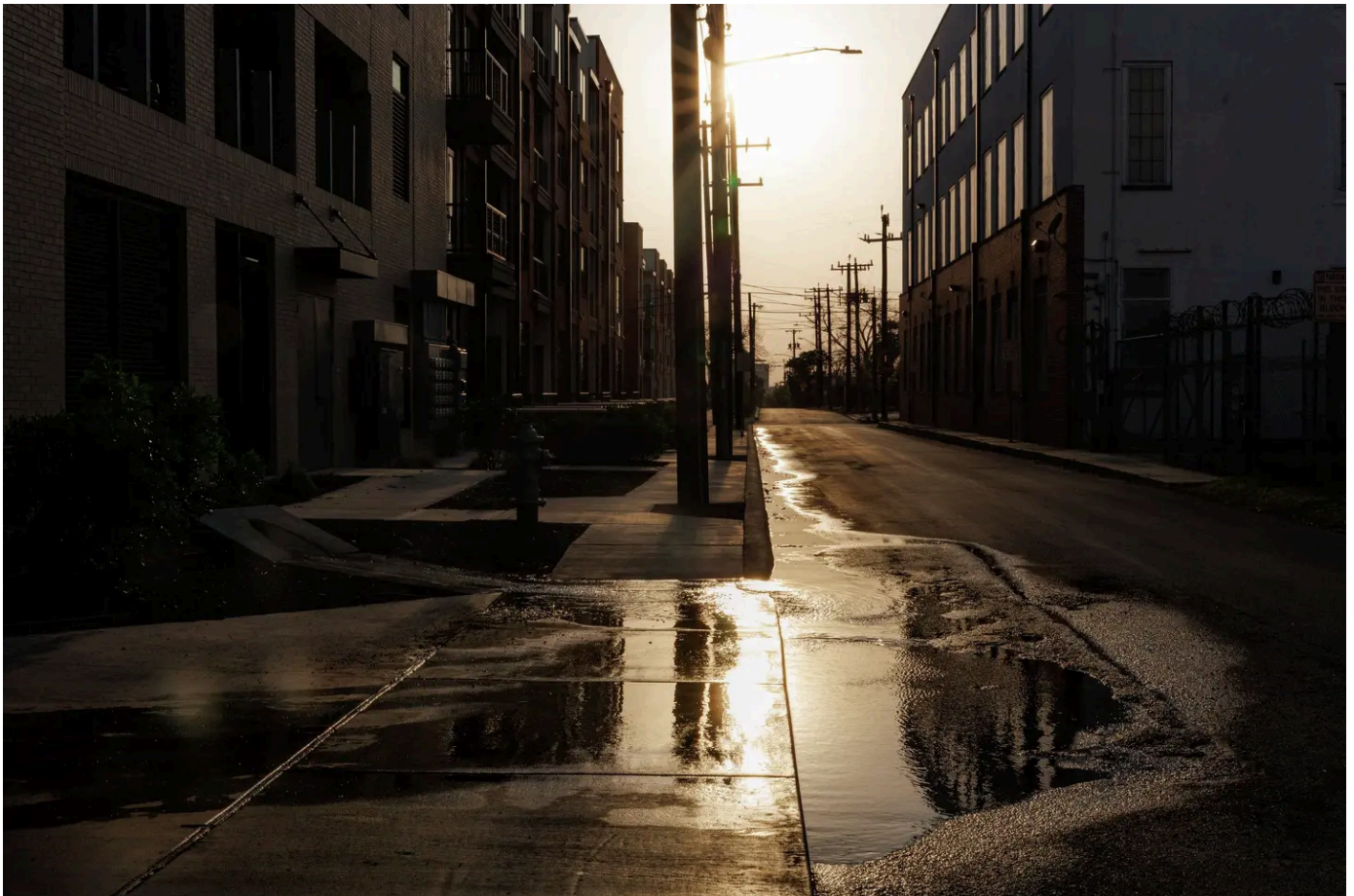
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Months of complaints

The city has been aware of the issue since at least last March, according to records from the Development Services Department.

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The first complaint came on March 22, 2025. “Citizen calling about a water leak happening at this apartment complex and causing algae growing now,” the file said. “SAWS went out and said it is on apartment property.”



Water flows down Quitman Street outside the Residences at Grayson Heights in San Antonio's Government Hill neighborhood on April 1.

Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

On April 10, the case file was closed, with the comment "owner complied."

Four more complaints came in April, followed by one in May, two in June, and one each in July, August and September. In total, the city received 11 reports about the water leak in about six months. After the first case was labeled closed, the next 10 were all labeled "no violation," according to the city's records.

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A department spokeswoman said that no citations or notices of violation have been issued at the property. The city declined interview requests and did not respond to written questions about the situation.

"The city remains engaged as the property owner and SAWS continue to address the ongoing water discharge issue," city spokesman Brian Chasnoff said in a statement in response to those questions.

SAWS also received repeated complaints about the water, records show.

"I'm writing AGAIN to protest the blatant waste of water from this apt complex every single day, at least twice a day," said one complaint received on Aug. 7.

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The report repeated the claim about algae, saying it was a safety hazard, as well as pointing out the water being wasted. “So we’re in a severe drought situation and the aquifer is down, but this place can just pour water down the street every day, multiple times a day and that’s okay? Please please do something about this.”

Another complaint in late September indicated it was continuing: “Several times a month observe large amounts of water running out of the new apartments between Carson and Grayson just south (of) New Braunfels (Avenue),” the report said. “This is a reoccurring issue and it's a significant amount of water.”

What can be done?

At a San Antonio City Council work session in February, during a discussion about SAWS' impending request to raise its rates, District 2 Council Member Jalen McKee-Rodriguez referenced the situation as an example of “unnecessary turmoil” involving SAWS' operations.

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“In Government Hill right now, we’re dealing with this water leak that’s leading to endless water being wasted,” he said. “You have a developer that wants to resolve the solution, has an idea and a proposal for such and feels like they’re being battled every step of the way.”

Feik argues that the solution is to put the water into SAWS’ sewer system. He said he proposed that to the utility months ago.

SAWS Chief Operating Officer Andrea Beymer said during a recent meeting with the Government Hill Alliance Neighborhood Association that putting the water into the SAWS sewer system could be a short-term solution, but the system in that area isn’t sized to handle an additional 30,000 gallons of water per day, and that if it rains, the system is at risk of overflowing.

“There have to be limits on it,” she said. SAWS’ modeling shows that with even a five-year rainfall event, which has a 20% chance of happening in any given year, the additional water in the system could cause the system to overflow.

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The best long-term solution, she said, is to put the water into the city’s stormwater system, which is separate from what SAWS calls its “sanitary sewer system.” But the nearest drain for the city’s system is more than 1 mile away, so creating a connection to that system would require ripping up streets.

Amin Tohmaz, director of development services for the city, told neighbors there isn’t money available for that work, and the city “can’t use public funds

to benefit one property.”

City officials are looking at drainage improvements for the entire area, he said — but “to do that will take years.”

Tohmaz said Feik’s engineers looked at piping the water to a drain on Spofford Street near Interstate 35 and found it would cost \$850,000 to \$1 million.

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In response to a question from Government Hill Alliance president Rose Hill about when residents could expect a solution, Beymer pointed to the finances.

“I think, between the city and SAWS, one of the issues is funding,” she said.

McKee-Rodriguez declined an interview request, but in a written statement placed fault for the delay primarily on SAWS.

“I have grown frustrated with the back-and-forth between San Antonio Water System and the developer that has gone on for the past year,” he said. “When a community is suffering, public entities have a greater responsibility to help drive solutions, and to that end, I have been disappointed by the pace of action from SAWS.”

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“This week, the city manager proposed a temporary solution involving SAWS, along with a permanent solution that includes cost-sharing with the developer,” McKee-Rodriguez said. “I welcome that progress and look forward to seeing this issue permanently resolved so that my constituents, who have borne the brunt of this situation, can finally get relief.”

Who should pay?

Feik says he’s already paid his fair share for neighborhood infrastructure, and shouldn’t have to pay more to solve the water issue.

He told the neighbors he’s paid \$1.5 million in permitting fees and \$1.5 million in impact fees, and put in \$4 million of infrastructure improvements as part of the project.

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“We feel like we’ve paid a good deal of money to put the infrastructure in place,” he said during the neighborhood meeting.

But SAWS said its share of those fees didn't take into account the added water that would be put into the sewer system from the garage drain.

"This infrastructure is sized to take the flow from the apartment complex," Burton said. "If you now want to increase the flows by putting an additional 30,000 gallons of water into the sewer system, you just have to increase the pipe size. So there will be more impact fees, there would be more construction, there would be more things associated with that."

In a written statement Thursday, the city said the proposed temporary solution under discussion this week is, in fact, discharging the water to the sewer system, "subject to SAWS approval and strict controls during rain events."

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"The permanent solution is a code-compliant connection to the storm drainage system, estimated at about \$900,000, with the developer proposed to pay roughly 60% of the cost and the city the remaining 40%," the statement said. "That agreement would clearly define the developer's obligations, the project timeline, and the steps needed to stop the ongoing impacts on the surrounding neighborhood."

That would put the city on the hook for an estimated \$360,000, and Feik about \$540,000.

But the city's proposal isn't a done deal yet.

Feik said Thursday that he still needs to have more conversations with the city about the specifics.

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SAWS said that it “supports the city’s proposed path forward,” but didn’t commit to it, saying that the temporary solution “may be considered while a permanent, storm drainage connection is pursued.”

“SAWS looks forward to continuing to partner with the city as project details are finalized to eliminate ongoing impacts to the surrounding neighborhood,” the utility said in a written statement.

McKee-Rodriguez declined to elaborate on the proposal, saying that he is “waiting on the developer, SAWS and city to agree on the solutions.”

Why can’t the water be used?

As the region remains locked in drought, with water sources under increasing pressure, there have been questions asked over the past year about why the water can’t be reused, instead of dumped onto the street or piped away.

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But SAWS and the building's owners both say doing so would require significant costs and effort for storage, treatment and transportation.

Seeger said Feik initially contacted him to ask about connecting the cistern that collects the water from the garage to the property's irrigation system, which would have been simple. But there's far too much water for that, he said.

Robert Hunt, another member of the ownership group, said they also considered capturing it and transporting it elsewhere to be used, but that would require "excessive" truck traffic through the neighborhood and be "deleterious to the streets," he told the neighborhood group.

Burton said SAWS can't capture the water and bring it into its system because doing so would require building both storage and treatment infrastructure to make the water match the rest of SAWS' supply.

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"We don't build a facility just for one particular other facility," he said.

The flows are also too inconsistent for the utility to rely on, and they don't know whether the water will continue flowing or at some point stop, making the "vast complexity" it would take for SAWS to use it impractical.

Burton said SAWS “highly encourages” the developer to find ways to reuse the water or find a customer to sell it to — similar to how Hemisfair treats groundwater from around the convention center to irrigate and fill water features at Civic Park.

“Ultimately the owner of the facility owns the groundwater beneath their feet. It is a private property right that they own,” he said.

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At the recent neighborhood association meeting, one resident addressed that, asking why SAWS and the city were responsible for the solution and not the building’s owner.

“Normally, yes, if the problem happens on your property, it's your problem and we ask you to fix it,” the city’s Tohmaz said. But the “right solution,” he said, is to find the source, which is why it’s taken so long.

“Because it’s an unusual issue, that’s why SAWS and the city are trying to help,” he said.

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“I’ve been with the city for over 10 years,” Tohmaz said. “I’ve never seen this before.”



The Residences at Grayson Heights is a new apartment complex in San Antonio’s Government Hill neighborhood. A steady stream of water is flowing from the complex’s parking garage, pooling on nearby roads and drawing complaints from nearby residents. Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

April 10, 2026



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