



Department of Public Works

Karen Dettmer, P.E.
Interim Commissioner of Public Works

For Immediate Release
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Interim Commissioner of Public Works Karen Dettmer Releases Statement on Appointment

Mayor Tom Barrett announced the appointment of Karen Dettmer as Interim Commissioner of the Department of Public Works on Monday, with the appointment effective December 17. Dettmer succeeds outgoing DPW Commissioner Jeff Polenske, who retired Friday.

Interim Commissioner Dettmer released the following statement regarding her appointment.

“I’m honored that Mayor Barrett and incoming Mayor Cavalier Johnson have entrusted me with the great responsibility of serving as Interim Commissioner of the Department of Public Works.

“Former Commissioner Jeff Polenske assembled an exceptional leadership team that ensured efficient operations across the department and inspired our employees to do their best work. Jeff’s leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic was truly remarkable as he guided the Department of Public Works through one of the most challenging times in our history. I wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

“Serving as the Superintendent of the Milwaukee Water Works is extremely rewarding. Water Works employees take tremendous pride in providing our nearly 900,000 customers with safe, reliable drinking water every day. I’m excited by the opportunity to continue overseeing the division and to further the work we started in building a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse workforce.”

Dettmer will continue to support [the Milwaukee Water Works, for which she has served as Superintendent](#) for nearly three years. She was appointed in February 2019 as a member of the mayor’s cabinet, and led efforts to achieve workforce equity among successful continuation of operations and initiatives during the Pandemic, including the water main and the lead service line replacement programs.

Prior to her leadership of the Water Works, a division of the Department of Public Works, Dettmer served as Public Works Coordination Manager for the City of Milwaukee, where she oversaw public works permitting and managed public works aspects of special projects. She also spent nearly ten years at the Department of City Development following working as an engineering consultant in the first part of her career.

Interim Commissioner Dettmer is a graduate of the Milwaukee School of Engineering, where she received her B.S. in Architectural Engineering and M.S in Environmental Engineering.

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