



Representative John Turner

District 114 | Email Update | Jan. 28, 2020

Date: January 28, 2020
Subject: Dallas Tornado Recovery Update

Friends and neighbors,

It's now been over three months since the tornado struck North Dallas. The recovery process continues, and for many of those affected, this is a challenging period.

Home and business owners continue to navigate the insurance claims process. The question of federal disaster aid to our local governments is still being resolved. Decisions are being made about whether and how to rebuild damaged properties, from schools to businesses to individual homes. Residents are anxious to see progress in returning their neighborhoods to normal.

I'd like to take this opportunity to provide an update on developments and to let you know about some of the issues our office is working on.

Request for Federal Disaster Assistance

As of this writing, we continue to await a decision about whether our region will receive a federal disaster declaration. This would clear the way for the federal government to provide financial assistance to local public entities (such as the City, the County, and school districts) for uninsured costs related to the tornado.

The deadline for final submission of the damage assessment to FEMA has been extended as stakeholders discuss the issue with federal officials. On January 13, the Governor sent a formal request to the President asking him to declare a major disaster for the State. Our two U.S. Senators and six of our U.S. House Representatives from Texas also sent letters to the President in support of the request. On behalf of the City, Mayor Eric Johnson recently met with FEMA.

Our office is in regular contact with local officials and the Texas Division of Emergency Management as this process continues. Aid from the federal government could be important in helping public entities like the City, the County, and Dallas ISD manage this disaster financially.

As a reminder, the possible federal funds at issue here are reimbursement of uninsured costs to *public entities*, not reimbursement of costs to private citizens or businesses.

Rebuilding of Schools

The Board of Trustees for Dallas ISD recently considered plans for the renovation or rebuilding of the three DISD campuses that were most severely damaged: Thomas Jefferson High School, Cary Middle School, and Walnut Hill Elementary. At the Board meeting on January 23, the Trustees approved plans to renovate Thomas Jefferson, and to create a new Pre-K to 8 campus to replace Cary and Walnut Hill, with an estimated total cost of \$132 million. The goal is to reopen campuses at these locations by the 2022-23 school year. In the

meantime, the students, parents, teachers, and employees of these three schools continue to adjust to being moved to new locations.

Our office will continue to monitor the progress of these schools and other affected campuses within District 114. It will be important for TJ, Cary, and Walnut Hill to receive the full support of the community during the period in which they are relocated. Community support will also be important to other schools, both public and private, that were significantly damaged and continue to recover.

Insurance and Contractor Issues

Many who were directly affected are now working with insurance providers, contractors, or both. Below are some useful resources and links, should you or someone you know need guidance on these topics.

The Texas Office of Public Insurance Counsel (OPIC) is a state agency established to represent the interests of Texas consumers in insurance matters. OPIC has a step-by-step guide to the claims process on their website at www.opic.texas.gov/residential-property-insurance/claims/. You can also call them at 1-877-611-6742.

The Texas Department of Insurance, a separate state agency, also offers a toll-free Consumer Help Line at 1-800-252-3439 to assist callers with insurance questions and concerns. The helpline is open Monday to Friday from 8 am to 5 pm.

The Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) offers tips regarding contractor fraud and scams at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/news/releases/ag-paxton-issues-consumer-alert-beware-repair-and-clean-scams>. Tips from OAG include the following:

- Don't sign a check from your insurance company over to a contractor.
- Only do business with licensed or bonded contractors or builders. Get multiple estimates.
- Be cautious of contractors who solicit services door-to-door, especially those that are unfamiliar or from out of town and try to pressure you into signing a contract on the spot.
- Get the salesperson's license plate number.
- Consult the Better Business Bureau to ensure you are working with a trustworthy business.
- Ask for referrals from people you trust and for references from contractors.
- Get more than one estimate on work, so you know if you're being overcharged. Don't be rushed into signing a contract and never pay in full up-front for promised work.
- Never pay cash up front to anyone for repairs. Consider paying by credit card to avail yourself of additional protections.
- Get everything in writing, including the terms of any warranty, and keep a copy of all documents.

If you suspect suspicious or fraudulent activity, you may file a complaint with the OAG online at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cpd/file-a-consumer-complaint>.

Replacement of Lost and Damaged Trees

While most of the focus has rightly been on damaged homes and structures, another consequence of the storm was the significant loss of trees. The Texas Trees Foundation estimates that more than 3,500 trees were destroyed in the tornado, and that a sizable additional number have been left in a hazardous state. The loss of so many beautiful, old trees is a constant reminder of how dramatically the storm altered the complexion of our neighborhoods.

The Texas Trees Foundation (<https://www.texastrees.org>) is willing to bring its expertise and resources to bear in helping replace lost trees. Residents of North Dallas should be on the lookout in the coming weeks and months for information about its plans to aid in tree replacement, both for individual homes and in public spaces. My office and I look forward to doing whatever we can to assist in these efforts.

In the meantime, the following link from the Texas Trees Foundation includes tree-related FAQs and a process for homeowners to determine the value of their damaged or lost trees: <https://www.texastrees.org/resource/dfw-post-storm-response-and-tree-care/>. At the same link, you can add your lost or damaged tree to their tornado damage database.

My staff and I continue to be available to assist those recovering from the lasting effects of this storm. Contact information for both our Dallas and Austin offices is below. We welcome your feedback about ongoing recovery efforts, including ideas for how you believe the State can best assist, and how we can improve our preparedness for future disasters. Should you need any help on any issue related to the recovery, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Sincerely,

John Turner
State Representative
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