Response to Director Johnson's Letter

By Carter Ohlmann 11/2/2026

Director Johnson's letter contains several materially inaccurate statements and misleading characterizations of the Ad Hoc Committee and the Board's approval and oversight of the Southland contract. These are not simply differences of opinion or interpretation. They are claims contradicted by readily available public records. Some of the statements go beyond factual error and create implications that the record does not support. Because the letter was distributed publicly, those inaccuracies need to be addressed publicly.

The public record establishes three important facts: the Ad Hoc Committee operates in an advisory capacity and does not control the Southland contract; the full Board unanimously approved the Southland contract; and no commitment has been made to proceed with construction of a new treatment plant. These facts directly address the letter's claims about the committee's authority, the Board's review and approval of the contract, and the District's intentions regarding future construction.

I will address each of these issues directly. I will then turn to a broader concern: the responsibility that comes with public service and the need for Board members to work together in the best interests of the community.

1. The Role and Authority of the Ad Hoc Committee

Director Johnson describes the two-person Ad Hoc Committee as having "sole and exclusive access and control" over Southland negotiations and contract decisions. This fundamentally mischaracterizes its role.

An Ad Hoc Committee is a committee of the Board, not a separate governing body. Under Section 2205.2 of the District's Policies and Procedures Manual, its function is to investigate issues, gather and evaluate information, report findings, and make recommendations to the full Board. It does not award contracts, authorize expenditures, or commit the District to contractual obligations.

The committee provides the time and focus needed to examine technically complex issues, review alternatives, and identify questions for the full Board. It prepares written

reports documenting its work, which are available to Directors and the public. The committee's purpose is to improve Board deliberations, not circumvent them. The full Board retains decision-making authority, and every Director remains responsible for independent review and judgment.

2. The Southland Contract and Board Authorization

The letter questions whether the approximately $1.7 million Southland agreement received appropriate Board approval and suggests the Board did not receive the contract until April 2026 despite contract commencement in September 2025.

The public record clearly answers both questions. On September 10, 2025, the full Board received the contract in the Board Packet and voted unanimously to award it. The action is documented in the meeting minutes, and the contract is included in the September 10, 2025 Board packet available on the District's website.

3. The Suggestion of a Contract Extension

The letter raises the possibility that the Ad Hoc Committee intends to extend Southland's agreement to allow the company to proceed with construction.

That is a serious implication, yet the letter identifies no approved extension, construction commitment, or Board action supporting it. Nor does it point to any committee report proposing such an arrangement or even suggesting such.

The Southland agreement is for engineering and alternatives-evaluation work, not construction. Any future construction project would require separate consideration and approval by the full Board, along with compliance with applicable procurement requirements. The committee has no authority to make that commitment.

4. The Responsibility of Public Service

Director Johnson's letter goes beyond a disagreement about committee procedures or project direction. It concerns the responsibility that comes with public office.

When a Director makes public statements about the authority, actions, and integrity of fellow Directors, those statements carry weight. Residents reasonably expect elected

officials—and particularly a Board officer—to review relevant public records before making such assertions.

I also believe there is a responsibility that comes with serving on a public board to make a good-faith effort to address disagreements and resolve questions through the Board's established processes before taking those disputes to the public. Public discussion and transparency are important, but they should not become substitutes for the work of examining the facts, asking questions, sharing information, and engaging constructively with fellow Directors. Taking unresolved internal disagreements into the public arena without first making a reasonable effort to address them at the Board level can undermine public trust and contribute to the divisiveness that has become increasingly evident on this Board.

Disagreement, scrutiny, and independent judgment are essential to good governance. So are accuracy, fairness, and diligence in representing the actions of the District and fellow Directors. A Director's credibility and influence should be used responsibly, not to create public doubt through claims that could have easily been checked against the public record.

We owe that standard to the residents we represent, the employees who serve the District, and the integrity of public service.

We are entitled to disagree, to question, and to criticize. We are not entitled to disregard the public record or misrepresent the actions of our fellow Directors.

5. Rebuilding Trust and Working Together

While it is important to correct the inaccuracies and misleading implications in Director Johnson's letter, my concerns extend beyond that letter. The circumstances surrounding it reflect a broader problem that I believe deserves attention: the growing divisiveness among members of this Board and the need to restore a spirit of cooperation and shared purpose.

I am deeply concerned about the divisiveness that has developed on this Board during the recent campaign period. The characterization of certain Board members as an "opposition" during the campaign is particularly troubling. To be clear, there are no opposing teams on this Board, nor should there be. We were all elected to serve the same community, and Board members should work together rather than treat one another as adversaries.

Recently, I read a statement in another Director's news article that I found perplexing and repeatedly asked the director for the supporting documentation. My requests went unanswered. I was left to wonder whether the information was being withheld because I was viewed as part of "the opposition." Whatever the reason, failing to respond to a straightforward request for the specifics of “research” mentioned in a fellow Director's letter further represents a troubling departure from the openness and cooperation necessary for effective Board service.

Different points of view are healthy and necessary. So is questioning controversial statements and asking for the documentation that supports them. That is not opposition; it is responsible oversight. We should be able to challenge one another's assertions, share information openly, and debate difficult issues without taking disagreements personally or allowing them to become divisive. Our focus should remain on the issues before us and our shared responsibility to the community.

In closing, I’d like to offer a reminder that we are all on the same team. We were elected to serve the same community and share a responsibility to act in its best interests. It is time to put division behind us, rebuild trust, and return to working together with openness, mutual respect, and a common purpose. Our community deserves nothing less.