



**Metropolitan Water  
Reclamation District  
of Greater Chicago**



2026 – 2030

# **MWRD STRATEGIC PLAN**





*It's a new dawn along the Chicago River as the MWRD embarks on its next five-year Strategic Plan to provide a new era of water environment improvement.*



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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



**On behalf of the MWRD Board of Commissioners, I am pleased to present the MWRD’s 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. While this landmark document sets out our future course, it took many years of collective work in our past to reach this stage.**

The precursor to this plan from 2021-2025 laid the groundwork for us to target new goals and metrics that build off our mission to protect our water environment. Now it is time to look further into the future with these initial goals in mind, while adapting to a changing climate, emerging trends and new demands to keep our region thriving.

As we adopt this new plan, we embark on a new five-year mission outlined by new objectives and initiatives that can be tracked through new progress. This important roadmap incorporates both the results of public surveys and the MWRD’s mission in protecting public health and the area water environment. Through financial and operational strengths, sustainable and innovative processes, external resources and a thriving workplace, this plan will establish how the MWRD can meet new goals in resource recovery, climate and energy resilience and best position the agency for years to come.

The new plan emphasizes core infrastructure and forward-looking resilience with priorities on wastewater treatment and stormwater management. Through this process of examination and input that took over a year to navigate, we have built consensus that the foundational infrastructure and core service reliability will require continued investment and attention, and as a result, that has become a central focus of this plan. Other priority areas include:

- ▶ Long-term infrastructure sustainability to support future demands and new regulatory compliance.
- ▶ Addressing flooding by increasing local partnerships and expanding stormwater management projects.
- ▶ Ensure compliance, focus on contaminant source control, and continue to protect Lake Michigan.
- ▶ Optimizing operations for efficiency and sustainability, preparing for climate/energy resilience, and integrating new technologies such as artificial intelligence.
- ▶ Reducing energy, exploring more water reuse initiatives, and enforcing the “polluter pays principle” to recover costs and generate revenue.
- ▶ Addressing talent recruitment/retention, building a diverse, skilled workforce, and investing in training.
- ▶ Effective community engagement through infrastructure planning and building trust. The emphasis involves shifting from mere outreach to co-creation with residents.

On behalf of the MWRD Board of Commissioners, I welcome you to not only read this plan but take part in it, by considering the MWRD’s mission and taking ownership of your own water environment. We all play a role, and as we like to say: Teamwork makes the dream work.

Sincerely,

Kari K. Steele  
*President, Board of Commissioners*



## ABOUT THE MWRD

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning unit of local government responsible for treating wastewater and managing stormwater in Cook County, Illinois. As new challenges emerge, the innovative work of the MWRD continues to evolve to benefit the water environment, ensuring services are reliable, equitable, sustainable and cost effective.

### **Our Purpose: Protect drinking water**

The MWRD was formed in 1889 by the state of Illinois as the Sanitary District of Chicago to protect Chicago’s drinking water source: Lake Michigan. Officials sought a way to prevent sewage and pollution-filled Chicago and Calumet Rivers from flowing into Lake Michigan.

The MWRD built a system of canals, channels and waterway improvements that reversed the flow of water away from Lake Michigan and towards the Des Plaines River, where it could be diluted as it flowed into the Illinois River and eventually the Mississippi River.



*The MWRD protects the source of drinking water in Lake Michigan by treating the region’s wastewater and capturing floodwaters and stormwater runoff.*



*The MWRD's vision extends hundreds of feet below ground through the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan, working to reduce flooding, improve water quality in Chicago area waterways and protect Lake Michigan from pollution.*

## **A wonder of engineering, science, and innovation**

While reversing the rivers helped to protect Lake Michigan, much more needed to be done. The MWRD developed wastewater treatment technology and built seven water reclamation plants. To collect and convey sewage to those plants for treatment, the MWRD built 560 miles of huge intercepting sewers.

The MWRD proactively adopted initiatives to protect the region's waterways, such as pollution control programs and wastewater standards for industry. The MWRD processes approximately 450 billion gallons of wastewater each year, releasing treated water into the rivers and canals and recovering resources like biosolids, nutrients, energy, and water.

## **Transformational tunnels and reservoirs**

The MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) is a system of deep, large diameter tunnels and vast reservoirs. TARP reduces flooding, improves water quality in Chicago area waterways and protects Lake Michigan from pollution caused by sewer overflows. TARP includes four tunnel systems totaling 110 miles of deep tunnels and three reservoirs: Majewski, Thornton and

McCook. Since the tunnels went online in 1981, sewer overflows have drastically decreased, and water quality has improved, as seen by the thriving and diverse local fish populations. When completed, TARP will have a total capacity of 17.5 billion gallons for combined sewage and stormwater.

## Stormwater, flood resilience, and green infrastructure

As the stormwater management authority for Cook County, the MWRD partners with communities on various flood reduction projects. The MWRD has worked with municipalities and other agencies to identify, develop, fund, and build nearly 250 projects to mitigate regional and localized flooding.

Between 2014 and 2025, the MWRD helped complete 137 green infrastructure projects retaining more than 24.4 million gallons of stormwater

storage. Green infrastructure helps reduce flooding with nature-based methods by holding rainwater where it falls. Effectively managing stormwater requires planning and public engagement with every community. Watershed Planning Councils help facilitate that engagement between the MWRD and hundreds of communities. Flood resilience takes all of us.

## Why this matters

The importance of MWRD's wastewater treatment and stormwater management is emphasized throughout this Strategic Plan. Clean water improves the quality of life for all. With the treatment of wastewater, the reduction of sewer overflows and partnering with communities to create green infrastructure and other flood

mitigation projects, the region's water quality has improved, enhancing the habitats for fish, birds and other wildlife. Healthier waterways provide avenues for people to connect with nature along the rivers and canals, creating a "second waterfront" for residents.



*Children enjoy the Grissom Elementary School playground where the MWRD and Space to Grow partners installed a permeable play area that captures rainfall. Space to Grow has transformed over 40 schoolyards to build nearly 9 million gallons of storage capacity.*

**To learn more, visit [mwrld.org](http://mwrld.org).**



# PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District’s planning process combined inclusive engagement, data-driven analysis, and disciplined governance to produce a practical, forward-looking Strategic Plan.

The Steering Committee first conducted a review of our identifying elements and prior plan accomplishments. We then invited input from employees, partners, and the public. These responses were analyzed to synthesize insights from the feedback to assist with prioritizing strategic objectives under each Pillar. Working groups then drafted the key results to be sought under each objective, and executive leadership ensured their clarity, feasibility, and alignment with the MWRD’s vision, mission, and values. This process positions the MWRD to deliver measurable progress across critical priorities in 2026-2030.

1

## Initial assessment

Review of Vision, Mission, Values, Pillars, and the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan’s accomplishments, key performance indicators, and lessons learned.

2

## Stakeholder engagement

Surveys completed by the Board of Commissioners, employees, and external stakeholders; feedback highlights included hundreds of public and employee responses, with Board of Commissioners’ input reinforcing core functions and preparedness for the future. See the appendix for more details on survey feedback.

3

## Working groups formation

Four pillar-based teams utilized the survey insights to identify objectives and priority outcomes (“key results”), guided by SMART criteria and ownership expectations.

S

SPECIFIC

M

MEASURABLE

A

ACHIEVABLE

R

RELEVANT

T

TIME-BOUND

4

## Draft framework development

Integration of vision, mission, and values with proposed pillar objectives, key results, measures/targets/timeframes, and initiatives.

5

## Executive review

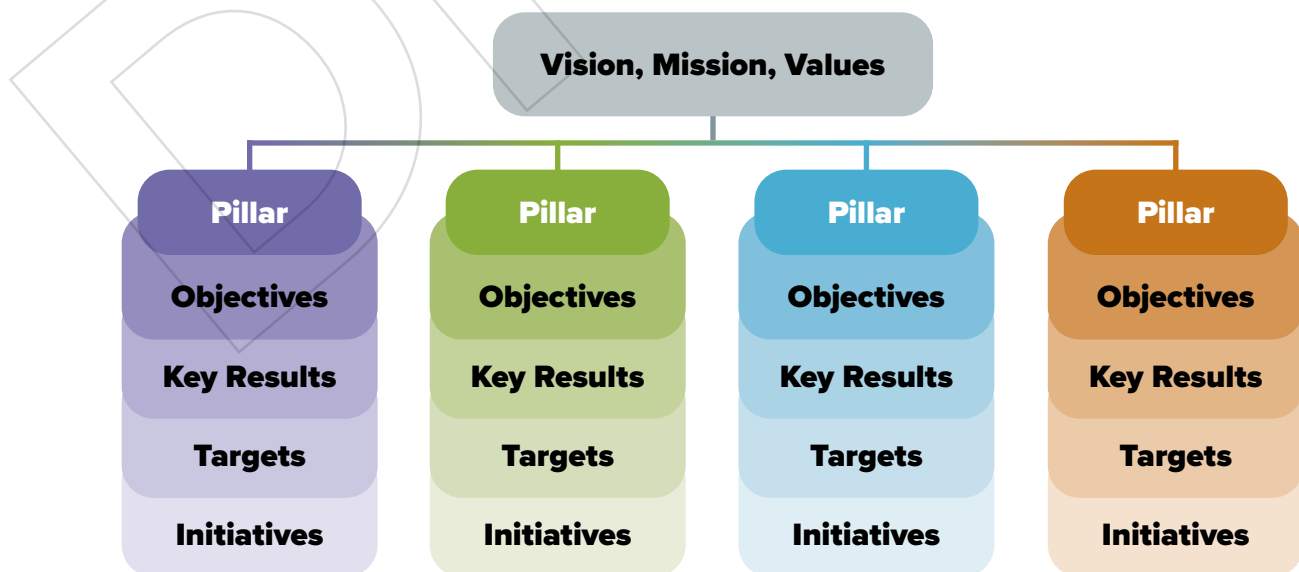
Leadership reviewed working group submittals to strengthen clarity and impact.



*From implementing new technology and developing science to installing green infrastructure and managing climate change, the MWRD prides itself on engaging the community it serves when creating the future initiatives that drive the Strategic Plan.*

## **MWRD Strategic Plan Architecture**

To build a solid strategic plan, the anchor concepts of Vision, Mission, Values, and Pillars must first define who the organization is; these long-term strategic elements are the identity of the organization. It is only on this firm foundation that strategic plans can be built to guide next steps. This architecture ensures all parts of the plan are aligned and set up for success.





# WHO WE ARE: VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

We began our 2026-2030 Strategic Plan build-out by first reassessing our identifying elements. The Steering Committee updated our vision with a commitment to a more hopeful future, while the mission was updated to bring us back to the essence of our original purpose. Meanwhile, our values were reaffirmed.

**VISION:** What we want to achieve in the future

*To champion clean water and sustainable communities.*

**MISSION:** What we do today

*To protect public health, improve our water environment, and build flood resilience.*

## Values

- ▶ **Excellence** We believe excellence is a never-ending journey to exceed the expectations placed upon us as individuals and as an organization.
- ▶ **Respect** We create an atmosphere of open communication that rewards commitment and performance and is responsive to the needs of our employees and communities.
- ▶ **Innovation** We endeavor to foster a culture of creativity to find solutions to the operational and environmental challenges facing us in order to build a more resilient region.
- ▶ **Safety** We are dedicated to safeguarding our greatest assets, our employees, as well as the environment and our communities.
- ▶ **Inclusivity** We strive in all areas of our work to treat people in a fair and just manner, to have a workforce and work practices that reflect the diversity of our region, and to ensure the full participation of all groups in our programs and services.
- ▶ **Accountability** We are responsible to the people we serve, the people we work with, and the environment we share.

*Water cascades over the MWRD's sidestream elevated pool aeration station in Blue Island, pumping up to 50,000 gallons of water per minute. This waterfall adds oxygen to improve water quality and protect aquatic life in the Cal-Sag Channel. ▶*

With our identity firmly established, we proceeded to identify the areas in which we must succeed to fulfill our mission and thrive as an organization — **these are our Pillars.**





# OUR CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS: THE FOUR PILLARS

Strategic pillars serve as the foundational supports of any strategic plan. They are the core areas of focus that hold up the long-term vision, ensuring that every initiative, investment, and decision aligns with what matters most. Much like the architectural pillars that support a building, these strategic pillars provide stability and coherence; they help us stay grounded in our purpose while giving us the flexibility to adapt as circumstances evolve. They also help us prioritize, guiding us toward opportunities that support our mission and away from distractions that do not.

As we progressed through the planning process, four areas emerged as the primary areas of focus. This update to our Pillars reflects a desire to streamline our strategy and un-silo our approach to the plan, allowing us to become more efficient through cross-pollination of ideas across the entire MWRD. The new structure also better supports changes to not just operations but also organizational culture to create lasting improvements. Additionally, we identified the specific functions and services that each Pillar encompasses while also recognizing that a given five-year plan may focus on only certain elements based on current landscape or conditions.





## **Wastewater & Stormwater Management** *Core Operations*

This pillar refers to the MWRD's core, everyday operations that protect our water environment, namely, wastewater treatment and stormwater management. These services improve water quality, reduce flooding, and keep essential systems running. It includes Permit Compliance, Regulatory Readiness, the Green Infrastructure Program, Inter-Governmental Agreements, Stormwater Masterplans, Combined Sewer Overflows Reduction, the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan, and Flood Mitigation.



## **Business Resilience** *Support Functions, Present-focused*

This pillar refers to administrative and support functions that enable the MWRD to maintain efficient and effective business operations. It focuses on providing a public service that is reliable and reflects the processes, systems, and safeguards that keep the organization operating effectively. It includes Fiscal Management (budget administration, procurement/contracts, cost management, grants), Risk Mitigation & Management (cybersecurity, internal controls, insurance, preventative measures), Business Continuity, Legal Matters, Customer/Constituent Service (incident report/response), and Stakeholder Engagement (education, public sentiment).



## **Resource Development & Management** *Tangible and Intangible Assets*

This pillar refers to utilization, employment, and leveraging of resources and assets. It aims to make the most of our people, facilities, funds, knowledge, and relationships to deliver sustainable value. It includes Human Resources (recruitment, development, retention, succession planning), Resource Recovery, Capital Improvements & Maintenance, Resource Allocation, Hard Assets (buildings, equipment), Cost Reduction/Recovery, Intellectual Property, and Institutional Knowledge Management.



## **Proactive Evolution** *Future-focused*

This pillar refers to intentional efforts to continually improve the MWRD and prepare for what the future may bring. It includes the Climate Action Plan, Funding Partnerships, Innovation, Research Partnerships, Creative Problem-Solving and Prevention, Artificial Intelligence/Emerging Technology, and Continuous Improvement.



## WASTEWATER & STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

This pillar refers to the MWRD’s core, everyday operations that protect our water environment, namely, wastewater treatment and stormwater management. In the next five years, we will focus on finding the best way to balance the requirements of the wastewater treatment process with the wellbeing of our residents while endeavoring to reduce contaminants and pollutants from entering our waterways in the first place. We will also reinforce our efforts towards resilient flood mitigation for the long-term.

### Pillar Objectives

- 1 Protect public and aquatic health.
- 2 Create lasting solutions for flood resilience.

## VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

*The MWRD’s extensive infrastructure is critical to meeting the stated goals. With such expansive infrastructure that has been in place for decades, investing in maintenance is key to providing reliable, cost-effective service to system users.*

— Strategic Plan Survey Participant





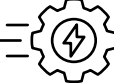
*In its work to reclaim water, the MWRD is constantly evolving to meet new challenges through innovation and infrastructure upgrades that allow the MWRD to raise its water quality standards and meet stringent permits.*

# KEY RESULTS SOUGHT

## 1 Success in protecting public and aquatic health will be reflected by:

- ✓ strategic optimization to sustainably provide permit compliance with current environmental permits;
- ✓ expanded efforts to reduce emerging contaminants in wastewater streams; and
- ✓ improved wastewater and collection system asset reliability.



### Measures of Success will include:

-  *normalized data points on the wastewater treatment process*
-  *number of partnerships to reduce emerging contaminants*
-  *reduction in number of emergency repairs due to asset failure*

## 2 Success in creating lasting solutions for flood resilience will be reflected by:

- ✓ expanded assessment of flood risk across our service area;
- ✓ increased flood mitigation participation at the local and regional level; and
- ✓ increased external funding for additional stormwater projects.

### Measures of Success will include:

-  *increases to stormwater storage volume throughout our service area*
-  *increases to Master Agreements with regional agencies*



## BUSINESS RESILIENCE

This pillar refers to administrative and support functions that enable the MWRD to maintain efficient and effective business operations. In the next five years, we will focus on strengthening our ability to conduct business under normal, varied, and extraordinary circumstances; making more data-informed spending decisions; and doing more with our dollars. We will work to ensure we remain reliable and accountable to our tax-payers.

### Pillar Objectives

- 1 Safeguard business continuity.
- 2 Bolster financial efficiency.

## VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

*[It is important for the MWRD to address] challenges in knowledge exchange, including knowledge silos . . . and loss of specialized knowledge as workers retire.*

— Strategic Plan Survey Participant



Visitors flock to the MWRD's Mainstream Pumping Station to learn how the MWRD manages the McCook Reservoir. Every year the MWRD hosts thousands of tourgoers to educate them on the MWRD's work and how everyone plays a role protecting the water environment.

# KEY RESULTS SOUGHT

**1 Success in safeguarding business continuity will be reflected by:**

- ✓ reinforced operational continuity and alignment with the evolving business landscape;
- ✓ strengthened accountability and redundancy for critical processes; and
- ✓ improved agency resilience and readiness for effective response to emergencies.

**Measures of Success will include:**



*progress in updating, validating, and improving administrative, operating, and emergency procedures*

**2 Success in bolstering financial efficiency will be reflected by:**

- ✓ broadened conscientious spending; and
- ✓ improved work unit productivity.

**Measures of Success will include:**



*expansion of project valuation methods*



*improvements to resource efficiency accomplished*



## RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT

This pillar refers to development, utilization, employment, and leveraging of resources and assets. In the next five years, we will focus on the reuse of biosolids, energy, and water, reinforcing our workforce, and deepening our partnerships, all to enhance shared, long-term value.

### Pillar Objectives

- 1 Advance resource recovery and reuse.
- 2 Cultivate a workplace that appeals to and retains existing employees.
- 3 Inspire highly qualified candidates to join the MWRD.
- 4 Foster mutually beneficial relationships with external stakeholders.

## VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

*[The MWRD must] build partnership[s] with our stakeholders to educate on how jointly we can support efforts to maintain our waterways [to be] safe from pollution and fight climate change.*

— Strategic Plan Survey Participant



Native plants are sprouting at Corkery Elementary School where the MWRD and Space to Grow partners are expanding permeable schoolyards filled with vibrant play areas.

# KEY RESULTS SOUGHT

## 1 Success in advancing resource recovery and reuse will be reflected by:

- ✓ increased phosphorus recovery and reuse via beneficial use of biosolids;
- ✓ increased use of recovered renewable energy; and
- ✓ increased beneficial reuse of non-potable treated effluent for use in irrigation, commercial, and industrial applications.

### Measures of Success will include:



*amount of phosphorus recovered*



*amount of generation and use of biogas and electricity*



*number of pilot studies initiated/completed on non-potable water reuse*

## 2 Success in cultivating a workplace that appeals to and retains existing employees will be reflected by:

- ✓ increased employee development opportunities and participation;
- ✓ improved employee sentiment on workplace culture; and
- ✓ improved employee satisfaction with work-life balance.

### Measures of Success will include:



*employee survey response scores across a variety of workplace topics*

## 3 Success in inspiring highly qualified candidates to join the MWRD will be reflected by:

- ✓ increased interest in employment at the MWRD; and
- ✓ greater success in filling vacancies.

### Measures of Success will include:



*number of applicants*



*number of eligible candidates*



*position fulfillment rates*

## 4 Success in fostering mutually beneficial relationships with external stakeholders will be reflected by:

- ✓ increased public engagement on flood resilience strategies;
- ✓ increased engagement and participation by Environmental Justice communities
- ✓ increased public awareness, understanding, advocacy, and trust in the MWRD's mission; and
- ✓ expanded participation by eligible small and diverse firms in MWRD contracting.

### Measures of Success will include:



*amount of community participation in various MWRD programs*



*number of local collaborations*



*number of new active firms in our vendor pool*



## PROACTIVE EVOLUTION

This pillar refers to intentional efforts to continually improve the MWRD and prepare for what the future may bring. In the next five years, we will focus on streamlining our work and building up our stamina to meet future financial, climate, and regulatory changes.

### Pillar Objectives

- 1 Continuously improve operations and processes.
- 2 Strengthen financial agility to navigate increasing costs.
- 3 Build robust resilience across environmental and regulatory fronts.

## VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

*We cannot control the rest of the world [on climate change], but we can control ourselves. Being a part of the solution instead of just passively allowing a problem to continue is vital.*

— Strategic Plan Survey Participant



The MWRD distributes thousands of rain barrels each year to Cook County residents at discounted prices to promote water conservation and water reuse.

# KEY RESULTS SOUGHT

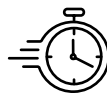
## 1 Success in continuously improving operations and processes will be reflected by:

- ✓ increased efficiency in the goods/services acquisition process;
- ✓ increased efficiency in business processes; and
- ✓ a strengthened culture of continuous improvement among management.

### Measures of Success will include:



*improved workflow of business processes*



*amount of reduction in cycle time of business processes*

## 2 Success in strengthening financial agility to navigate increasing costs will be reflected by:

- ✓ greater diversity in the revenue portfolio;
- ✓ controlled expenditure growth in the Corporate Fund;
- ✓ appropriate fee structures; and
- ✓ a sustained capacity to issue debt as necessary.

### Measures of Success will include:



*efforts to expand our revenue portfolio*



*control of expenditure growth*



*progress on updating our fee structure*

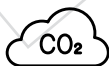


*our limited tax debt service ratio*

## 3 Success in building robust resilience across environmental and regulatory fronts will be reflected by:

- ✓ a reduction in our carbon footprint;
- ✓ increased organizational consideration of climate impact and resiliency in decision-making;
- ✓ preemptive preparedness to meet potential new regulations; and
- ✓ increased innovative solution generation re: climate risk mitigation, energy, and compliance resilience.

### Measures of Success will include:



*reduction in greenhouse gas emissions*



*expanded efforts to prepare for climate threats*



*evaluations of emerging regulatory issues*



*increase in innovative ideas for resilience*





## LOOKING AHEAD



**As we embark on the journey mapped out in the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, we do so with confidence, purpose, and optimism.**

This plan is more than a roadmap; it is a commitment to innovation, sustainability, and collaboration that will strengthen our communities and protect our vital water resources for generations to come. But most importantly, it is a commitment to our residents and businesses. We are all in this together, so with the dedication of our staff and the support of our partners, we will turn these objectives into achievements and challenges into opportunities. The future is bright, and with this plan as our guide, we are ready to lead the way.

While these are our best efforts to guide the MWRD's future given today's circumstances, we understand that the world is constantly evolving; therefore, this Strategic Plan will remain a living document, agile enough to adapt to the changes around us while holding firm to our core principles. Please stay tuned to [mwr.org/strategic-plan](http://mwr.org/strategic-plan) for updates on the Plan and to view the progress toward our goals.

Sincerely,

John P. Murray  
Executive Director

◀ *The sun rises over Stickney Water Reclamation Plant as the MWRD outlines the next five years through a landmark planning process to define the vision, mission, values and priority pillars that keep the MWRD on a sustainable and successful path for decades to come.*



# 2025 MWRD SURVEY

To inform development of the Strategic Plan, the MWRD conducted a wide set of surveys to assess current conditions, organizational priorities, and external expectations related to each Strategic Pillar.

The Board of Commissioners were asked to identify priority areas for the MWRD, with responses emphasizing the importance of the MWRD’s core functions while underscoring the need for long-term preparedness and adaptability. The Executive Team survey asked department heads and managers to complete a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to evaluate internal capabilities and external pressures affecting the organization, and employees responded to an internal staff survey focused on current conditions, operational challenges, and future priorities.

In addition, an External Stakeholder survey was distributed to non-governmental organizations, assist agencies, tenants, industrial users, local governments, emergency contacts, and members of the general public via social media; it generated hundreds of responses. While some survey responses reflected interests beyond the MWRD’s funded mandates for wastewater treatment and stormwater management, a significant portion aligned with the MWRD’s core responsibilities.

Common themes emerged from the survey responses; these insights, along with staff observations and expertise, were used to shape the strategic plan to be both mission-focused and forward-looking, ensuring the MWRD remains resilient, efficient, and prepared to serve the region over the next five years.



**Water Quality**, with pollution and contaminant control, was high-lighted by both internal and external stakeholders. Our response will take place under the Pillars of **Wastewater & Stormwater Management** and **Resource Development & Management**. We will continue to focus on protecting public and aquatic health through excellent wastewater treatment practices along with strengthening service reliability and pollution/contamination prevention. We will also step up efforts in phosphorus recovery and reuse.



Another significant area of concern was **Flooding/Stormwater Management** along with **Climate Change and Resilience**; these related topics were noted across all stakeholder types surveyed. Our **Wastewater & Stormwater Management** and **Proactive Evolution** Pillars will address this concern. In addition to continuing to provide proven solutions and exploring new opportunities for flood resiliency, we will also continue to expand knowledge among residents and businesses so that they can also take actions to mitigate flooding in their communities.



Internal stakeholders from the Board through management and staff agree that **Business Operations** is an integral part of the MWRD’s success. This area is undergirded by the pillars of **Business Resilience** and **Proactive Evolution**, which address existing and anticipated needs, respectively. In this Strategic Plan, we will prioritize ensuring business continuity so that we can continue to provide reliable service to Cook County through fair and foul weather. We will also explore opportunities to optimize our financial position to improve our financial efficiency and prepare for future needs as costs increase. And finally, we will foster a culture of continuous improvement for faster productivity, more accurate results, and increased value to our stakeholders.



Employees and Management both pointed to **Recruitment and Retention** as a major internal challenge. All internal stakeholders recognized strong competition for talent and a potential loss of institutional knowledge as our current workforce retires. Under the **Resource Development & Management** Pillar, we will place a more focused effort on expanding interest in joining the MWRD and in providing value-added development opportunities for our existing employees.



# 2021–2025 STRATEGIC PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Strategic Goal: Resource Management

### Objective 1: Protect public health and area waterways.

- ▶ Achieved 100% permit compliance in 333 of 336 IEPA reporting periods from 2021 through 2024.
- ▶ Five WRPs extended NACWA Peak Performance Platinum Awards.
- ▶ Stickney WRP increased its compliance streak to five years of Gold recognition, making it eligible for a Platinum award in 2025.
- ▶ Held Annual Regulatory Radar meetings and Capital Update meetings to support informed planning and the capital plan.
- ▶ Negotiated a chloride source control program for Kirie WRP service area to shift emphasis from end-of-pipe limits to upstream control strategies.
- ▶ Continued participation in the DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup through the Hanover Park and Egan WRPs to help determine realistic limits.
- ▶ Led significant pilot studies on biological phosphorus removal at Calumet, O'Brien, and Egan WRPs.
- ▶ Conducted a full-scale demonstration of enhanced biological phosphorus removal in Tank 1A at the Hanover Park WRP to improve water quality and support planning for upcoming regulations.
- ▶ Maintained a leadership role in national and regional water quality initiatives, contributing data and operational insights to nutrient reduction, biosolids optimization, and emerging contaminant frameworks.

### Objective 2: Recover and reuse resources.

- ▶ Began a design-build project for the installation of a combined heat and power (CHP) system at the Egan WRP to beneficially reuse digester biogas to produce electricity and recover heat.
- ▶ Installed new boilers at the Hanover Park WRP to optimize biogas utilization for process heat and to improve energy efficiency.
- ▶ The Ostara system has matured, and incremental improvements have been implemented to optimize phosphorus recovery and stabilize biological processes while balancing chemical use and energy demands.
- ▶ As of year-end 2024, the MWRD has received approximately 1.85 million gallons of high-strength organic material at Stickney WRP from inception of the Resource Recovery Ordinance. This additional carbon load is introduced into the Stickney WRP influent to enhance biological phosphorus removal.
- ▶ Completed a multi-year Energy Neutrality Study, which developed conceptual plans to achieve energy neutrality at one WRP by 2030 and agency-wide neutrality by 2035. Staff are currently reviewing the plan's recommendations for feasibility and integration into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to enhance organizational resiliency.
- ▶ Since the Strategic Plan was adopted, MWRD staff have increased tracking of process water usage and MWRD commissioners have adopted a water reuse resolution to support expanded water reuse opportunities for the MWRD.

## Strategic Goal: Stormwater Management

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### **Objective 3: Mitigate flooding across Cook County through a proactive, equitable stormwater management program.**

- ▶ Began local community partnerships, including:
  - ▶ A multi-benefit flood control project near the confluence of Deer Creek and Third Creek to create 538 million gallons of storage capacity in southeast Cook County.
  - ▶ The Harvey Central Park Stormwater Detention Basin, which will provide flood relief for 209 structures while serving as a dual-use open-water pond and green space.
- ▶ Continued construction of the McCook Reservoir to provide a total of 10 billion gallons of storage capacity at completion.
- ▶ Completed a diversion sewer from the Westchester Pumping Station to TARP to reduce CSOs in Addison Creek.
- ▶ Added 125 projects to the Stormwater Program.
- ▶ Protected over 2,400 structures from flood damage.
- ▶ Created 9.9 million gallons of retention capacity through the Green Infrastructure Program.

## Strategic Goal: Workforce Excellence

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### **Objective 4: Recruit best-in-class employees.**

- ▶ Broadened recruitment reach through:
  - ▶ Collaborations with new associations and agency groups.
  - ▶ Participation in industry-specific groups focused on workforce issues in the water and wastewater sector.
  - ▶ New “Career Spotlight” videos to highlight different jobs at the MWRD.
- ▶ Expanded the pipeline of skilled recruits through new apprenticeship and trainee programs.
- ▶ Began to tap internal employee experiences to inform recruitment strategies going forward.

### **Objective 5: Develop best-in-class employees.**

- ▶ Launched a coaching training program for supervisors and managers.
- ▶ Reinforced the emphasis on continuing education through:
  - ▶ The Continuous Learning Initiative to establish development hours goals for managers and supervisors.
  - ▶ A new development plan section in annual employee performance evaluations.

### **Objective 6: Retain best-in-class employees.**

- ▶ Obtained a better understanding of employee needs through an employee survey.
- ▶ Provided onsite health and wellness center and nursing facilities at the Stickney WRP.
- ▶ Connected employees to information they need through a new intranet.
- ▶ Provided new healthcare cost benefits.

## Strategic Goal: Community Engagement

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### **Objective 7: Position the MWRD as a critical community asset, responsive neighbor, and inclusive business partner.**

- ▶ Targeted two-way communications through Community Partnership Councils and in environmental justice communities.
- ▶ Received the Spirit of Giving Award for our commitment to empowering students, supporting educational equity, and giving back to the communities.
- ▶ Increased the number of community engagement events year over year.
- ▶ More than doubled our social media reach in followers.
- ▶ Implemented and hosted an annual Small/Diverse Business Summit and quarterly Vendor 101 trainings and Assist Agency Meetings.
- ▶ Digitalized procurement communications and pre-bid conferences.
- ▶ Developed and implemented procedures to continually expand and refine the vendor database and better target vendors.
- ▶ Added over 1,300 new vendors and increased the average number of bidders by 21%.

## Strategic Goal: Enterprise Resilience

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### **Objective 8: Proactively expand efforts to strengthen functionality in the face of future events.**

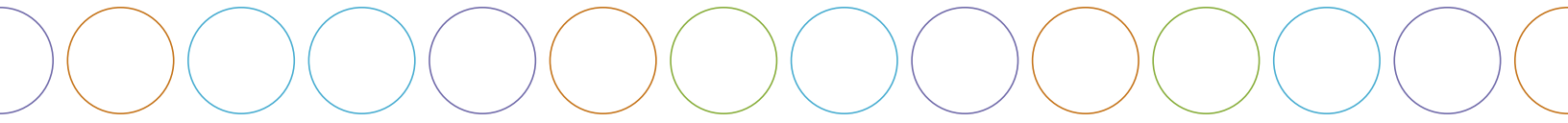
- ▶ Achieved a 39.7% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to 2005 levels, surpassing the Strategic Plan 2021–2025 goal of 28% by 2025. From 2020 to date, GHG emissions have been reduced by 21.8%.
- ▶ Recognized by the International Water Association as a top three finalist out of a field of more than 90 international water utilities for our climate action leadership.
- ▶ Continued three consecutive years of renewable energy credit (REC) purchases.
- ▶ Launched an electric vehicle pilot program.
- ▶ Authorized to construct and finance on-site renewable energy projects that power facilities on MWRD property, pursuant to Public Act 103-0299.

### **Objective 9: Provide cost-effective services.**

- ▶ Improved to an AA+ credit rating from S&P Global and maintained AAA credit rating from Fitch to provide lower borrowing costs when issuing bonds.
- ▶ Funded approximately 37% of our 2025 Stormwater Program project costs with grants and cost-share partnerships.

### **Objective 10: Continuously improve business operations.**

- ▶ Reduced permit processing time through the Watershed Management Ordinance Permit Application Submittal System upgrade.
- ▶ Enhanced security and reduced fraud risk by developing a real-time alert feature for vendor financial information changes.
- ▶ Reduced data storage electricity usage by 50% and enhanced analytics, data management, and security with an upgraded data storage platform.
- ▶ Expanded public engagement and accessibility to public meetings by implementing a live closed-captioning solution.
- ▶ Further automated vendor payments and workflows through an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) invoice processing upgrade.
- ▶ Modernized and streamlined the budget system and annual planning process through implementation of a cloud-based solution.
- ▶ Strengthened time-keeping controls through worktime coding enhancements and biometric authentication.
- ▶ Initiated ERP assessment project to modernize the MWRD systems and processes for the long-term.



2026 – 2030

# MWRD STRATEGIC PLAN



[mwrld.org](http://mwrld.org)



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