



**Metropolitan Water  
Reclamation District  
of Greater Chicago**

# **STRATEGIC PLAN**

## **2025 UPDATE**



**MWRD  
STRATEGIC  
PLAN**  
2021-2025



**MWRD  
STRATEGIC  
PLAN**  
2021-2025

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### 1 UPDATE TO THE 2021-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

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#### STRATEGIC GOALS OR “PILLARS”

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During the pandemic, the MWRD embarked on a journey to develop a five-year strategic plan, with the goal of strengthening the agency and positioning it for continued success. We looked inward and outward to identify actions to ensure the MWRD remained sustainable in all functions. The resulting 2021-2025 Strategic Plan was ambitious not only in nature but also in volume, with over 140 action plans reaching every facet of the MWRD.

The Steering Committee developed the Strategic Plan in accordance with the issues and needs facing the MWRD during the planning period, however, acknowledging that it is a living document with goals and action plans to be reviewed and revised annually. This living document allowed us to remain relevant to emerging trends, changing environments, new industry standards and our expanding capabilities, all while remaining true to the Plan’s main strategic areas of focus in support of the MWRD’s mission.

As the Strategic Plan approaches its sunset, we provide a summary of the efforts made on each of the 10 main Strategic Objectives along with selected results comparing the Strategic Plan’s start to now. We celebrate the progress that has been accomplished and acknowledge the work that is yet to be done, and we recognize that the achievements of the Plan are a testament to the hard work put in by all MWRD staff.

John P. Murray  
Acting Executive Director  
October 2025

#### Mission

The MWRD will protect the health and safety of the public in its service area, protect the quality of the water supply source (Lake Michigan), improve the quality of water in watercourses in its service area, protect businesses and homes from flood damages, and manage water as a vital resource for its service area.

#### Vision

We will continue to be a world-leading wastewater and stormwater management utility focused on flooding mitigation, resource recovery, sustainability, resilience, and innovation.

#### Values

Excellence  
Respect  
Innovation  
Safety  
Equity & Diversity  
Accountability



## YEAR FOUR HIGHLIGHTS

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The 2021-2025 Strategic Plan concluded its fourth year in June 2025 and was approximately 90 percent completed as of July 2025. Accomplishments to date include:

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**Completed the MWRD Energy Neutrality Plan** which incorporated a full review of optimization measures, renewable energy generation, greenhouse gas reduction goals, environmental justice, regulatory impacts, and other future considerations. Some recommendations naturally align with projects already included in the Capital Improvement Program, and the others will be carefully evaluated and thoughtfully integrated over the coming years to ensure they support the MWRD's core responsibilities.

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**Protected water quality in Addison Creek by completing the connection of a diversion sewer from the Westchester Pumping Station to the Roosevelt Road leg of the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) on May 9, 2025.** Originally constructed in 1951, the Westchester Pumping Station no longer needs to pump combined sewer overflows into Addison Creek during wet weather events.

**Optimized the operations of the phosphorus (“P”) recovery system at Stickney Water Reclamation Plant to ensure effluent P limits are consistently met.** The Stickney Ostara facility produced 300 tons in 2024 and has produced 227 net tons in 2025 (through June 2025).

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**Developed a public-facing Stormwater Planning Hub as a dynamic web portal, featuring a GIS story map, mapping applications, and stormwater planning data.** A “Stormwater 101” story map provides historical context, information on the causes of flooding, and promotes shared responsibilities. A Public Project and Data Explorer Mapping Application showcases the MWRD's Stormwater capital projects, with a new Data Request Form to support consulting engineers and officials seeking reports or plans. The program will launch in late 2025.

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**Developed the MWRD Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Program following a comprehensive review of contract engagement, policies, and procedures.** In looking historically at the MWRD's commitment to widen contract opportunities, we developed a framework that identifies gaps and opportunities in our contracting priorities to deliver a robust SBE contracting program. The new SBE Program strengthens the MWRD by including best practices for outreach and engagement, contract participation, training and support, as well as the achievement of measurable outcomes to meet its goals and mission. The program will launch in 2026.



**Launched a new employee intranet portal.** The more modern intranet portal provides added opportunity for collaboration between employees and enhances the MWRD's ability to communicate and engage all staff. The portal includes a bulletin board that highlights events, benefits, MWRD news and other items of interest to employees. It also offers employees quick access to documents, including shared documents for collaboration, forms, and computer applications such as the transfer portal, time and attendance system, benefits portal, and training platform.

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**Launched the Information Technology Department Innovation Program.** The program seeks to create a framework for exploring emerging computing technologies that reduce cost, enhance process efficiency, and support community engagement. It also encourages external and cross-departmental collaboration and will use proof-of-concept methods to further enhance current and future business needs at the MWRD.

## OBJECTIVE 1

# RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:

Protect public health and area waterways

**The MWRD has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting public health and improving area waterways through exceptional compliance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits and related regulations.**

### Permit Compliance (2021–2024)

From 2021 through 2024, the MWRD achieved 100% permit compliance in 333 of 336 IEPA reporting periods—an achievement that underscores the MWRD’s operational excellence and its commitment to reinvesting in treatment infrastructure to further improve water quality.

### Regulatory Negotiation and External Engagement

The MWRD actively engaged with regulators, partners, and stakeholders to shape realistic, science-driven permit conditions while maintaining transparency and strategic foresight.

### Key Compliance Highlights:

- 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.
- Calumet WRP, while historically the MWRD’s most consistent high-performer, experienced two reporting periods that had violations during this time and saw its status drop from Platinum to Silver. It remains within the top quartile of participating utilities nationwide, an indicator of good performance.

## KEY INITIATIVES:



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** demonstration 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.

## Supporting Permit Compliance and Regulatory Readiness

Strategic capital investments during the plan period directly supported the MWRD's ability to meet evolving regulatory requirements, particularly related to nutrient control and operational resilience.



### Stickney WRP

Installed a temporary chemical phosphorus removal backup system to ensure robust permit compliance during the COVID-19 pandemic. A permanent system is currently under construction.



### Kirie WRP

Optimized the temporary biological phosphorus removal system to support full scale permanent system implementation and started installation on a chemical phosphorus removal backup system.



### Calumet WRP

- Completed a comprehensive phosphorus removal plan and implemented a chemical phosphorus removal system in 2024.
- Continued and intensified targeted industrial user surveillance to identify significant point sources of phosphorus.



### O'Brien WRP

- Converting Battery D to full-scale side-stream enhanced biological phosphorus removal (S2EBPR) battery, with an expected completion in 2026.
- Requesting bids for a new Battery E designed using the latest technologies and optimized for biological phosphorus removal with an expected completion of 2028.

**Egan WRP & Hanover Park WRP** Piloting multiple biological phosphorus removal strategies to prepare for future permit requirements.

**Egan WRP** Participating in a Water Research Foundation (WRF) Tailored Collaboration Grant project titled "Balancing Carbon Management, Energy Management, Energy Production, Nutrient Removal, and Densification."





## **OBJECTIVE 2**

# **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:**

Recover and reuse resources

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**The MWRD continues to make significant progress in recovering and reusing valuable resources from the wastewater treatment process.**

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Through investment in technology, optimization of existing systems, and pursuit of circular economy strategies, the MWRD is reducing waste, generating beneficial products, and strengthening energy and operational resilience.

In early 2024, the MWRD embarked on 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. Work progress included completion of 95% final engineering drawings, procurement of two 560-kw CHP engines from

Nissen Energy in Denmark, fabrication of a gas-treatment system from Unison Solutions, and construction of an energy recovery building to house the CHP engines and portions of the gas treatment system. Project completion and operational testing is scheduled for Fall 2026. The project will supply upwards of 53% of the electrical demand and offset 121% of the digester heating demand for the Egan WRP at maximum production.

New boilers are being installed at the Hanover Park WRP and Stickney WRP to optimize biogas utilization for process heat and to improve energy efficiency.



**ABOVE** Anaerobic digesters at Egan Water Reclamation Plant produce biogas that the MWRD harnesses to produce electricity, recover heat, and reduce energy demands.

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS



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.

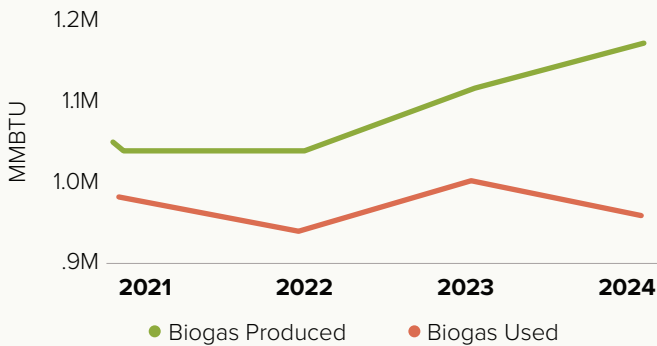


Completed a multi-year Energy Neutrality Study, which developed conceptual plans to achieve energy neutrality at one WRP by 2030 and agency-wide neutrality by 2035. Staff are currently reviewing the plan's recommendations for feasibility and integration into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to enhance organizational resiliency.



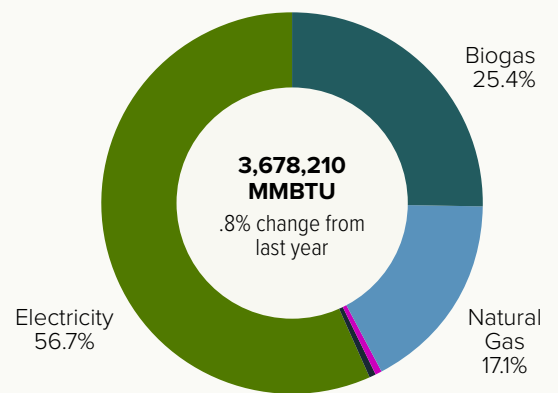
Since the Strategic Plan was adopted, MWRD staff have increased tracking of process water usage and MWRD commissioners have adopted a water reuse resolution and supported new legislation to support expanded water reuse opportunities for the MWRD.

**Biogas Produced and Used**

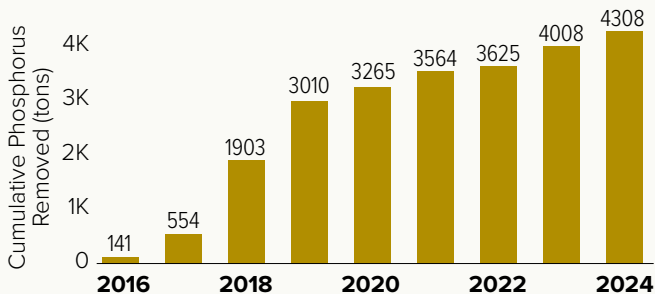


A British thermal unit (Btu) is the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of one pound of water by one degree Fahrenheit.

**2024 Energy Consumed**



**Phosphorus Recovered as Crystal Green Fertilizer**



### OBJECTIVE 3

## STORMWATER MANAGEMENT:

Mitigate flooding across Cook County through a proactive, equitable stormwater management program.

#### The MWRD uses a multi-pronged approach to reduce flooding risk in its service area.

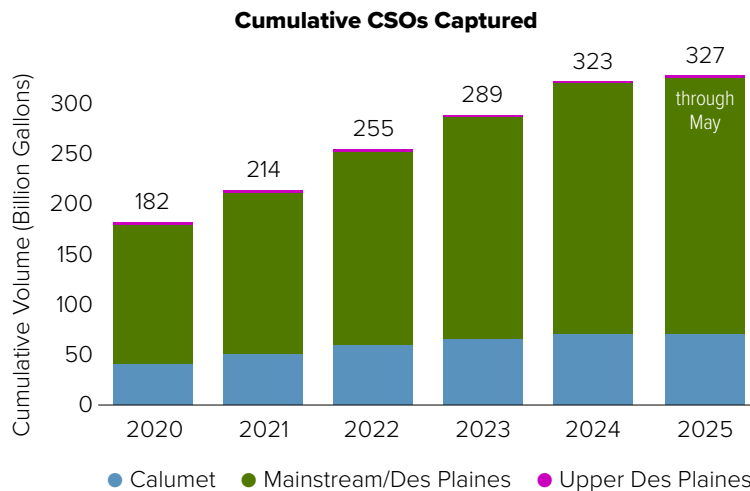
**Local community partnerships** offer an opportunity to collaborate with external stakeholders on flood mitigation projects. In January 2025, the MWRD began feasibility planning for a multi-benefit flood control project near the confluence of Deer Creek and Third Creek in southeast Cook County. This is the culmination of over five years of discussion and collaboration with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County to identify a project site and plan a regional stormwater reservoir project that will provide flood reduction benefits, ecological restoration, and outdoor recreation and amenities to underserved communities. The proposed project would create 1,650 acre-feet (538 million gallons) of stormwater storage, benefiting seven communities near and downstream of the project area.

The Harvey Central Park Stormwater Detention Basin project's main achievement will be the construction of a 23-acre-foot detention basin capable of holding 7.5 million gallons of stormwater, which, along with 10,000 feet of new storm sewers, will provide much-needed flood relief to the community. This will directly benefit 209 structures during a 100-year storm event and reduce basement backups. Beyond flood mitigation, the project will significantly benefit the Harvey community by transforming the site into a 4.4-acre area with a dual-use open-water pond and green space, complete with new walking paths and other recreational improvements

Another major component of the MWRD's stormwater management program is the **Tunnel and Reservoir Project (TARP)**. The MWRD adopted this groundbreaking program in 1972 to reduce flooding, improve water quality in Chicago area waterways and protect Lake Michigan from pollution caused by sewer overflows.

A large part of TARP is the McCook Reservoir. Stage 1 became operational in December 2017, providing an initial 3.5 billion gallons of CSO and stormwater storage capacity. Mining of Stage 2 of the reservoir is now 84% complete and will provide another 6.5 billion gallons of storage capacity.

The Westchester Pumping Station was originally constructed in 1951 to provide relief to the Berkley-Hillside Intercepting Sewer and the Broadview-Bellwood Intercepting Sewer during wet weather events by pumping combined sewer overflows (CSOs) into Addison Creek. With the goal of reducing CSOs into Addison Creek, the MWRD constructed a diversion sewer to connect the Westchester Pumping Station with the Roosevelt Road leg of the TARP at drop shaft DS-D34-AI. Successfully completed on May 9, 2025, the connection will reduce the frequency of combined sewer overflow events into Addison Creek.







**FROM 2020  
THROUGH 2024**

**125**

Projects added to  
the Stormwater  
program

**2,442**

Structures protected

**9.9**

Million gallons  
retention capacity  
created through the  
Green Infrastructure  
Program

The Robbins Heritage Park  
constructed by the MWRD mitigates  
flooding with a naturalized wetland  
detention area near 136th Street  
and Kedzie Avenue.



**OBJECTIVE 4**  
**WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE:**

Recruit best-in-class employees

**Best-in-class employees are the foundation of our ongoing success, and this begins with recruiting a talented and diverse workforce that is reflective of the communities we serve.**

One of the focal points of the recruitment strategy over this period has been to broaden the reach of the recruiting efforts and to identify specific, targeted recruitment sources to solicit top-tier talent. To accomplish this goal, the MWRD has partnered with numerous associations and agency groups to reach a more diverse audience. In addition, the MWRD created “Career Spotlight” videos highlighting various jobs at the MWRD to help market its broad range of career opportunities.

The MWRD also joined two industry-specific groups focused on workforce issues in the water and wastewater sector. These include the U.S. Water Alliance Water Taskforce and the Great Lakes ReNew Workforce Development Working Group. Both groups focus on understanding the local water workforce landscape and developing strategies to address challenges and barriers to employment in the water sector.

**MWRD Employee Population**

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
	Actual				Projected
<b>Minorities</b>	44%	44%	44%	45%	45%
<b>Females</b>	26%	26%	26%	27%	28%

In 2024, the Human Resources Department formed the Recruitment Strategy Committee to solicit ideas from subject matter experts internally. Each MWRD department participated on the committee. The goal was to engage staff from the various disciplines throughout the MWRD. The MWRD will continue to leverage this committee for innovative recruiting ideas going forward.

In an effort to promote more diverse participation in the skilled trades, the MWRD expanded its apprenticeship programs. In collaboration with its union partners and the Department of Labor, the

MWRD developed and launched two programs—the Operating Engineer Trainee program and the Machinist Apprenticeship program.

To extend these efforts beyond the skilled trades, the MWRD is creating a trainee program for plant operations. In partnership with the City Colleges of Chicago, the MWRD has developed a new Treatment Plant Operator Apprenticeship program that will launch in early 2026. This will provide the MWRD with a new pipeline of talent interested in a career in the wastewater industry.

To ensure it continues to have a pipeline of top talent into the future, the MWRD expanded its internship program to provide more opportunities for college students to explore future employment in the various careers at the MWRD. In addition, the MWRD piloted an internship program for high school students through a partnership with the Chicago Summer Business Institute (CSBI) in 2025. The CSBI provides Chicago high school students with an opportunity to experience jobs in business and finance. The MWRD welcomed our first CSBI students in 2025 and will explore additional opportunities for high school students in other fields across the organization.

These recruitment initiatives have positively impacted the diversity of the MWRD’s workforce as shown in the table on the left. The MWRD has been able to attract and hire from a more diverse pool of applicants leading to growth in both the minority and female employee populations.

**New Partnership Highlights**

- Chicago Mentor Program
- Chicago Public Schools Skilled Trades Fair
- Chicago Women in Trades
- HIRE360
- Loyola University Women in Business

**RIGHT** Staff manage critical materials, equipment, and inventory required to clean water at Stickney Water Reclamation Plant.





**AT A GLANCE:  
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS**



**Created** “Career Spotlight”  
employee videos



**Joined** two wastewater-  
specific workforce groups



**Formed** employee  
Recruitment Strategy  
Committee



**Launched** Operating  
Engineer Trainee Program,  
Machinist Apprenticeship  
Program, and Treatment  
Plant Operator  
Apprenticeship Program



## **OBJECTIVE 5**

# **WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE:**

Develop best-in-class employees

**We invest in our future by investing in our employees through training and development opportunities to help them grow in their current role and prepare them for future roles within the organization.**

The MWRD continually seeks feedback from departments on areas where training and development might benefit employees and the organization. Training has been conducted in areas such as customer service, public speaking, construction cost estimation, odor recognition, public procurement, and technical writing. In addition, the MWRD continues to select staff each year for participation in off-site training programs such as the Water and Wastewater Leadership Center and CORE Emerging Leaders Training.

In 2024, the MWRD launched a new coaching training program for employees in supervisor and manager roles. Approximately 500 employees participated in these live training seminars, which was the first phase of a three year training program to address skills gaps, enhance existing talents, and identify future leaders. The next phase of the program is leadership training being developed for implementation in early 2026.

To reinforce the importance of employee development, we launched the Continuous Learning Initiative in 2024. The objective is to establish a recommended annual number of training and development hours for each MWRD job classification as a goal for managers and supervisors. The recommendations are based on industry information and feedback solicited from each of the MWRD operating departments. Recommendations for training will be published for use by operating departments in early 2026.

Additionally, the MWRD implemented a new performance management system, which automated the performance evaluation process and eliminated the need for paper evaluation forms. The new system includes a section to outline employee goals and a section for the supervisor and employee to establish a development plan for the coming year.



**ABOVE** MWRD staff manage the train delivery of solids to lagoons and drying beds at the MWRD's Lawndale Avenue Solids Management Area.

## OBJECTIVE 6 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE:

Retain best-in-class employees

**To retain the best of the best, we must foster a culture that recognizes the value of every employee and meets their evolving needs.**

The MWRD launched its first employee satisfaction survey in 2023 to assess MWRD culture through employee engagement and feedback. The survey focused on areas such as communication and engagement; culture; job satisfaction; leadership and strategy; diversity, equity, and inclusion; growth and development; and compensation and benefits. It provided critical insights into employees' perception of the MWRD and the work environment that have helped guide strategic plan initiatives. A follow-up survey is planned for 2026.

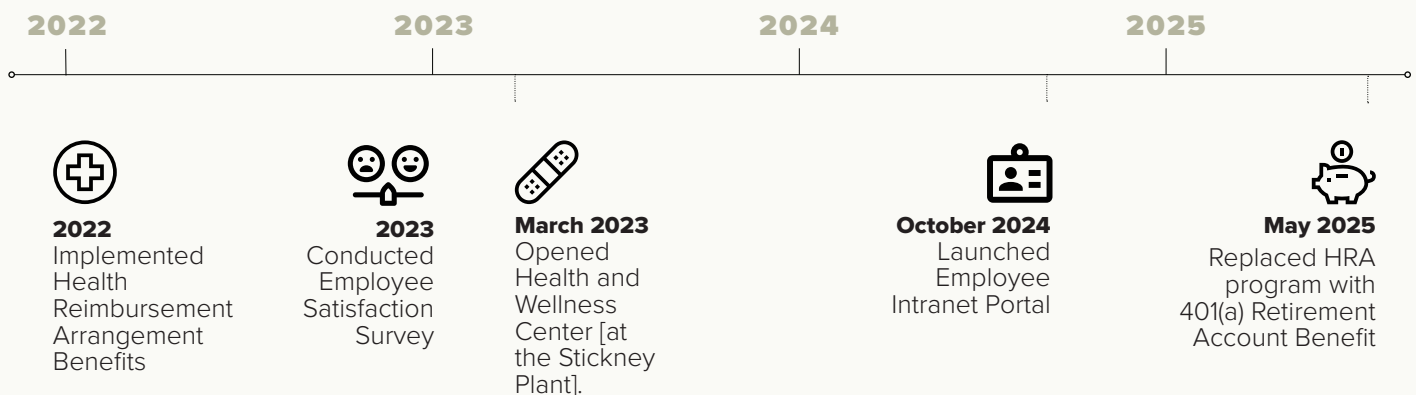
To reinforce the MWRD's commitment to health and well-being, the MWRD opened the Employee Health and Wellness Center at the Stickney Plant in early 2023. The center is staffed by a physician assistant and provides onsite healthcare services such as urgent care; basic primary care; prescribing and dispensing medications; health and wellness activities; injury assessment; and basic laboratory services. Telemedicine services are also offered to employees at other MWRD locations. In late 2023, the MWRD added a newly renovated Nursing Room, providing partitioned spaces for privacy for up to three employees.

Improving employee engagement was a focal point in our retention strategy, and its centerpiece was the development of a new employee intranet portal. The more modern portal launched in October 2024 and enhances the MWRD's ability to communicate and engage staff, and provides added opportunity for collaboration between employees. It includes a bulletin board that promotes upcoming events, MWRD news, employee benefits, and other information of interest to employees. The portal is available to all employees from their computer or via mobile app. Since going live, the portal has seen over 727,000 visits from 1,864 unique viewers.

To meet evolving needs, the MWRD added to its employee benefits program. In 2022, the MWRD implemented a new health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) account benefit for all employees. These accounts are wholly funded by the MWRD and provide employees with another resource to manage rising health care costs.

In 2025, the MWRD introduced a new 401(a) retirement account benefit that will replace this HRA program. This new program is also wholly funded by the MWRD and will help provide additional retirement security to employees.

### AT A GLANCE: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



## OBJECTIVE 7

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Position the MWRD as a critical community asset, responsive neighbor, and inclusive business partner

**To enhance community engagement, the MWRD invites the public for a closer glimpse of its work throughout the year and at special events.**



**ABOVE** Visitors to the MWRD's Calumet Water Reclamation are greeted by MWRD police at an open house.

Through August 1, 2025, the MWRD had engaged with more than an estimated 258,000 people encountered at over 430 events throughout the year. This includes hosting open houses, attending fairs, giving tours and presentations, making speaking engagements and other outreach activities.

We build long-term relationships with community stakeholders through **sustained, two-way communication**. Our Environmental Justice Section, Stickney Water Reclamation Plant staff, and Office of Public Affairs coordinated the work of a Stickney Community Partnership Council to build more community engagement with the neighbors and communities that are served by the plant, while also attending regular Town of Cicero Stormwater Advisory Board meetings to foster collaboration and enhance community engagement in addressing flooding. We have also commemorated many key water quality improvement and stormwater

management projects that range in scope from green alleys to creek restorations, levees and green schoolyards that inspire other communities to take action and join us in our mission of protecting our water environment and reducing flooding.

We have sought ways to **ensure equitable access to information**, programs, and resources across all demographics. We target outreach campaigns in environmental justice communities, providing bilingual staff and communications and celebrating our rich and diverse cultures with flag raising events and receptions. In our goal to engage the youth and future workforce, we continue to connect and widen our audience with schools and outreach materials and education. This summer we hosted Cook County Sheriff's campers at Stickney and the Beaubien Woods Youth Outdoor Ambassadors at our Calumet WRP, two examples of the hundreds of groups we host





MWRD staff take pride in their work, sharing their knowledge and educating residents on ways to protect their water environment.

### 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

**125th Anniversary** of the reversal of the Chicago River



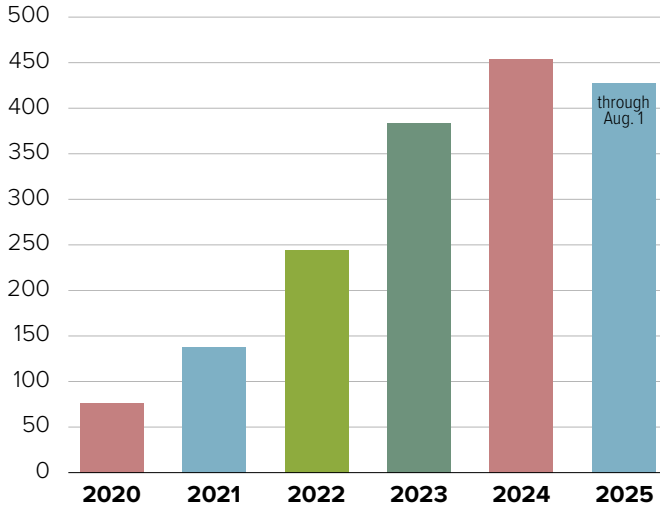
**13th Annual** Sustainability Summit





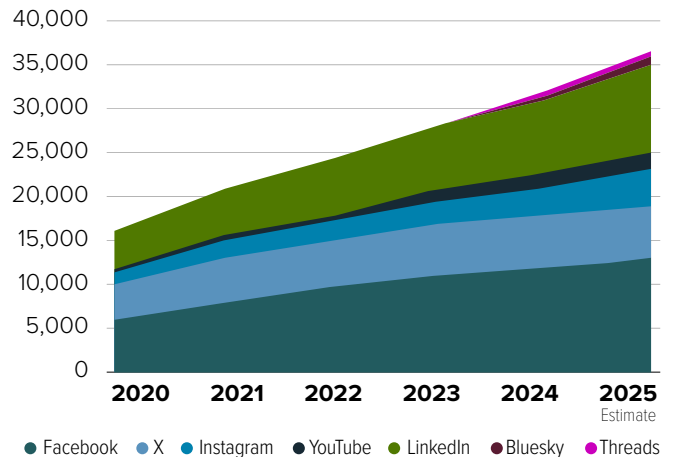
and engage with all year. For our efforts, in 2025, we received the Spirit of Giving Award from Communities In Schools (CIS) of Chicago. This distinguished recognition honors our commitment to empowering students, supporting educational equity, and giving back to the communities that the MWRD serves.

### MWRD Community Engagement Events



The MWRD has also engaged new audiences and strengthened our relationships with partners by modernizing how we communicate online.

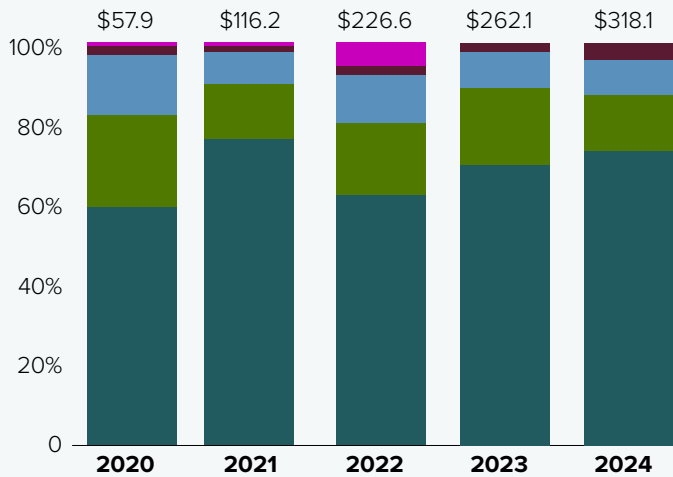
### MWRD Social Media Followers



- Since 2020, our followers on social media have more than doubled from 16,237 to more than 34,642 through June of 2025.
- We actively advise the public of climate-related risks and emergency events through storm updates, infrastructure news, and website content.
- We have increased awareness and registration for water conservation and protection for our environment by promoting Overflow Action Alerts subscriptions made via social media, text message, and email.

### The MWRD's Diversity in Contracting program has grown significantly.

Total MWRD Contract Awards with Goals (millions)



	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Prime Contractors	\$34.1	\$88.4	\$140.9	\$181.6	\$233.3
MBE Commitments	13.4	16.1	39.9	49.9	46.0
WBE Commitments	8.7	9.5	28.1	24.4	27.6
VBE Commitments	1.3	1.4	3.7	6.0	11.2
SBE Commitments	0.4	0.8	14.0	0.2	-
<b>Total Program</b>	<b>\$57.9</b>	<b>\$116.2</b>	<b>\$226.6</b>	<b>\$262.1</b>	<b>\$318.1</b>

In existence since 1977-78, the Diversity program has remained dedicated and consistent in its advocacy, outreach, and subcontract awards to Minority-owned businesses (MBE), Women-owned businesses (WBE) and Veteran-owned businesses (VBE) no matter the total amount in contracts awarded with goals each year. To streamline the process, vendors can apply for certification throughout the year, and businesses recently certified as MBE, WBE, or VBE by the City of Chicago or Cook County are eligible to participate in our abbreviated certification process; please visit [www.mwrdd.org/doing-business/affirmative-action](http://www.mwrdd.org/doing-business/affirmative-action) for more information.

### KEY ENGAGEMENTS

- Quarterly Vendor 101 trainings since 2023
- Quarterly Assist Agency Meetings since 2023
- Annual Small/Diverse Business Summits since 2022

**The MWRD seeks to invest our financial assets in a manner that reflects the makeup of our communities without sacrificing our priorities of security, liquidity, and yield.**

- From 2020 through 2024, 58-69% of our annual investments have been purchased through MBEs, WBEs, and VBEs.
- Currently, 12 depository banks and 29 broker/dealers have been certified as eligible to accept our investments.

**The MWRD has also implemented several changes to enhance the experience of vendors that do business with us:**

**AT A GLANCE: KEY ENHANCEMENTS**



We enhanced our procurement system to allow the use of email for communicating invitations to bid, requests for quotations, and purchase orders.



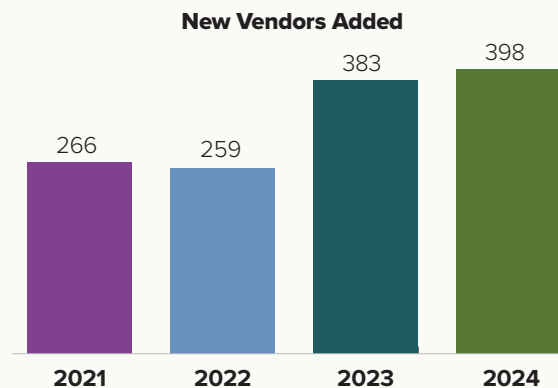
Beginning in 2022, all pre-bid conferences have been conducted via Zoom, making it more convenient and efficient for bidders to attend. We standardized and recorded the conferences, ensuring that vendors are adequately informed of the process and requirements for projects and bidding.



The Procurement & Materials Management (P&MM) webpage was redesigned, including enhancements to the vendor application portal and additional search functionality to provide public access to contract information, including award information, original and current purchase order values, and payments made. This has increased transparency and may decrease the need to process FOIA requests.



P&MM staff have developed and implemented procedures to continually expand and refine the vendor database and better target vendors. This includes outreach to temporary vendors and construction companies who have bid on municipal projects, providing contract announcements to Public Affairs for weekly email blasts, a new vendor onboarding brochure, creation of a video tutorial to help vendors comply with bidding procedures, weekly reminder emails to vendors to ensure compliance with bid procedures, and implementing validation checks in our bidding software to reduce non-responsive bids.



**These efforts have resulted in the addition of 398 new vendors in 2024** (which is 49.6% more than the 266 added in 2021). In addition, the number of bidders per advertised contract has risen more than 21%, from 2.51 bidders per contract in 2021 to 3.04 bidders per contract in 2024.



## OBJECTIVE 8

# ENTERPRISE RESILIENCE:

Proactively expand efforts to strengthen functionality in the face of future events

**Since releasing our first Climate Action Plan in 2023, the MWRD has made strong progress across all four strategy tiers.**

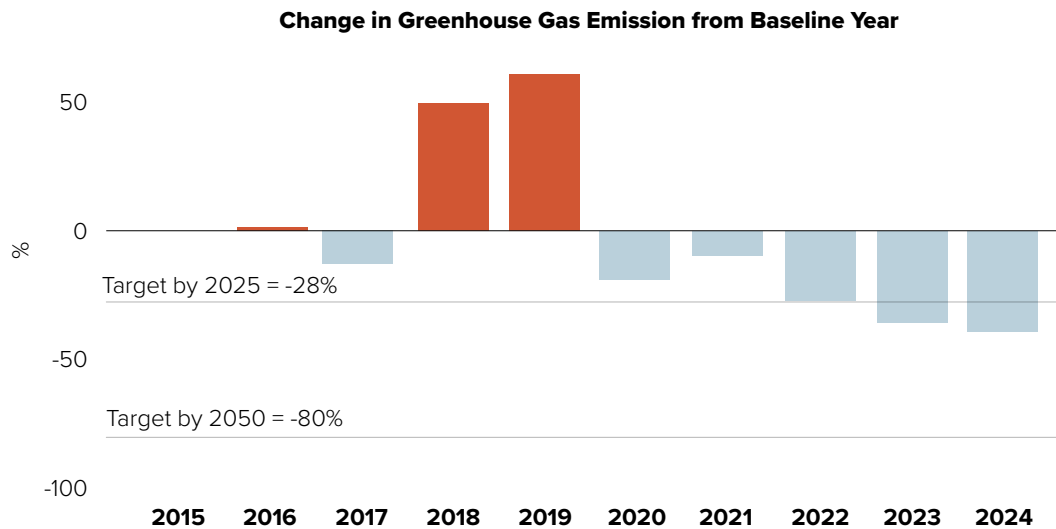
The plan helped align our efforts with climate goals and created a clear path toward greater sustainability and resilience.

**In Tier 1**, which targets direct emissions from operations, the MWRD reached several key milestones. In 2024, we decommissioned the remaining Imhoff tanks at Stickney WRP, removing a major methane source. We also secured contracts to install co-firing boilers at Stickney and Hanover Park WRPs to support cleaner energy. As part of our electric vehicle (EV) pilot launched in 2022, six charging stations are now in place, nine EVs have been added, and five hybrid vehicles are expected this year. Also, significant strides have been made in improving energy efficiency, and we completed the Energy Neutrality Plan for the Hanover Park WRP, identifying targeted system improvements to reduce energy demand. Aeration system upgrades, a major contributor to energy use, are being incorporated into the design of the O'Brien WRP Battery-E. Our staff continues to support national efforts through active participation in the Water Research Foundation's (WRF) tailored research program focused on balancing carbon management with energy and nutrient optimization.

**Under Tier 2**, which focuses on renewable energy, the MWRD awarded a contract to install a biogas-powered CHP system at Egan WRP, expected online by mid-2026 with support from federal incentives. A Districtwide Energy Neutrality Study was completed in 2024 to help reduce grid reliance. Renewable Energy Credit purchases from 2022–2024 offset 58,000 to 78,000 metric tons of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) each year. A new state law (Public Act 103-0299) allows the MWRD to construct and finance on-site solar and wind projects that power facilities on MWRD property.

**Tier 3** targets future GHG reductions through research and monitoring. In 2023, the MWRD completed a study on nitrous oxide emissions at Stickney and Kirie WRPs. A broader emissions study with Princeton and Northwestern is underway, with results expected this year. Staff are also contributing to national research on lifecycle GHG accounting and participating in the WRF projects to better understand nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) emissions through advanced monitoring.

**In Tier 4**, focused on carbon insets and offsets, the MWRD completed a 2023 pilot using algae biofilm



for carbon capture. Staff are also part of a WRF project exploring offset strategies through the Water-Energy-Food nexus for future emissions reduction.

Beyond these four tiers, the MWRD continues to take steps to build regional climate resilience. As of 2024, the MWRD has implemented a new employee travel policy encouraging carbon offsets for all business-

related air travel. Furthermore, the MWRD is actively supporting the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning in their applications for Climate Pollution Reduction Grants to further regional climate action.

**To explore more about our carbon reduction strategies and climate initiatives, please visit the Strategic Plan Dashboard at [mwrdd.org](https://mwrdd.org).**

### **AT A GLANCE: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS**



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 for its climate action leadership, the MWRD was **honored by the International Water Association** among the top three finalists out of a field of more than 90 international water utilities.



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.

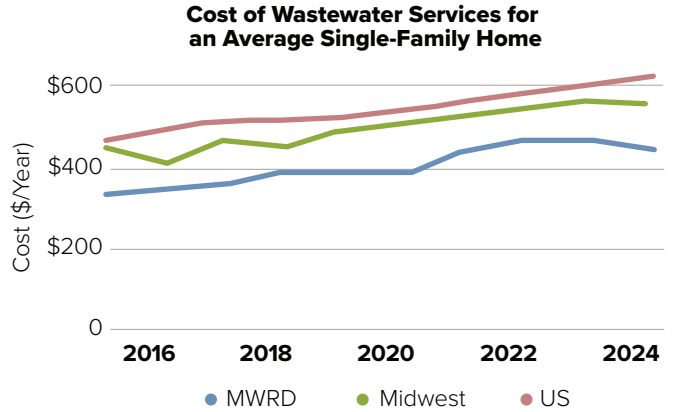
**OBJECTIVE 9**  
**ENTERPRISE RESILIENCE:**

Provide cost-effective services

**The MWRD has always striven to be a responsible steward of public funds.**

The MWRD’s cost of wastewater services has been consistently and significantly lower than our national and regional benchmarks, providing both value and quality to our taxpayers.

Maintaining our top credit ratings is another key way to remain mindful of taxpayer burden. High credit ratings generally result in lower borrowing costs when issuing bonds. Fitch’s AAA rating was maintained during the five-year period and acknowledged our strong financial profile. S&P Global Ratings upgraded us from AA to AA+ in 2022, crediting our operational management policies, strong liquidity, and affordability. S&P has since maintained this rating, crediting the Strategic Plan’s comprehensive approach to address climate, regulatory, and affordability considerations, along with a healthy financial position. Our funding policies for both the Retirement Fund and Other Postemployment Benefits Fund also demonstrate



a commitment to long-term fiscal management and contribute to the MWRD’s strong credit ratings.

The MWRD uses the budget process to align District-wide activities to Strategic Plan priorities and tracks projects directly related to the Strategic Plan in the Budget. The graph (right) shows the funding included for new Strategic Plan initiatives each year; this strategic investment in projects helps to ensure a responsible and focused use of funds. Note that we are now substantially complete with the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, so many initiatives are

**MWRD Bond Credit Ratings**

FITCH RATINGS

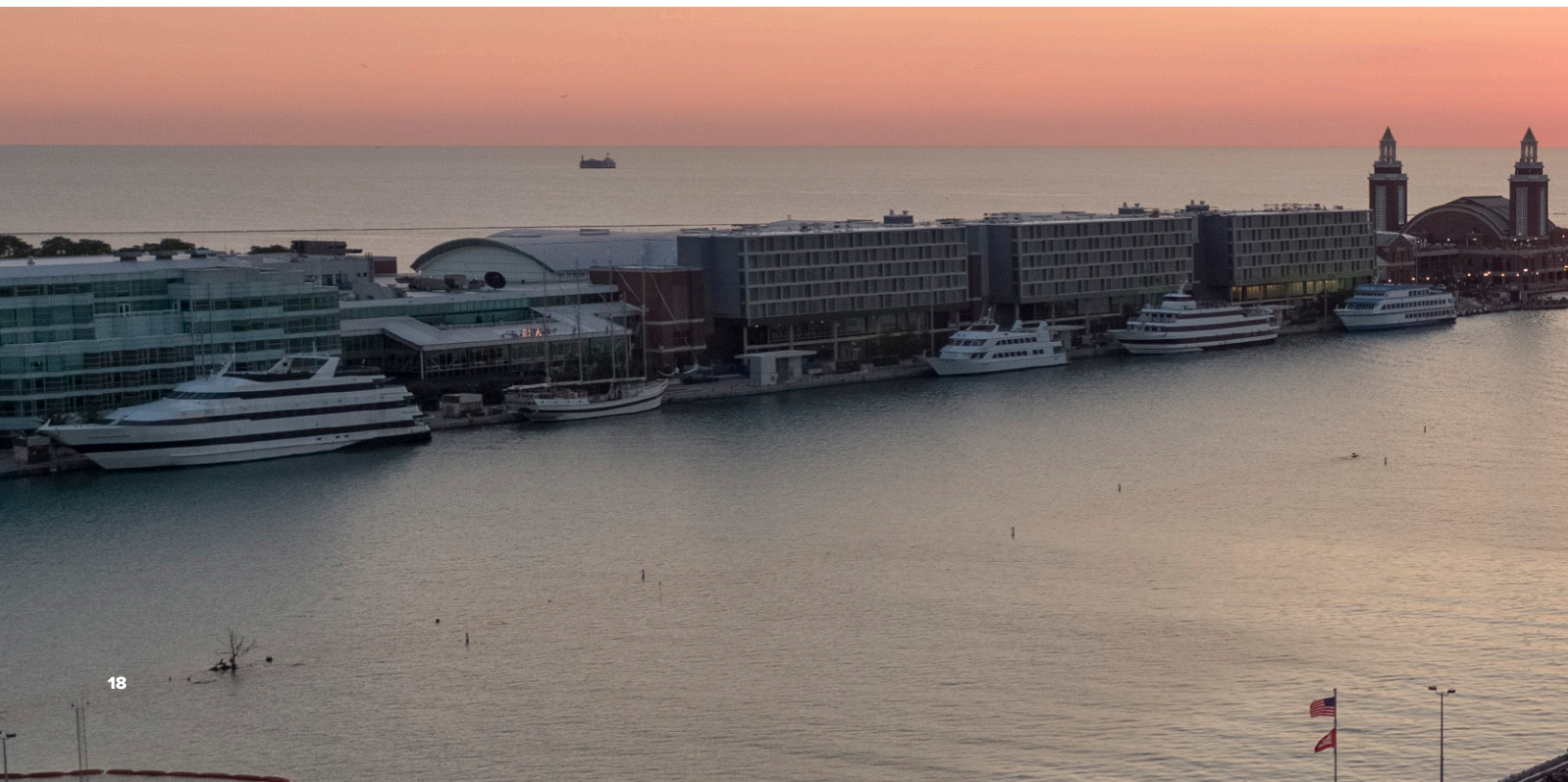
**AAA**

STABLE

S&P GLOBAL RATINGS

**AA+**

STABLE





**BELOW** The MWRD maintains the flow and quality of water entering the Chicago River from Lake Michigan at the Chicago River Controlling Works.

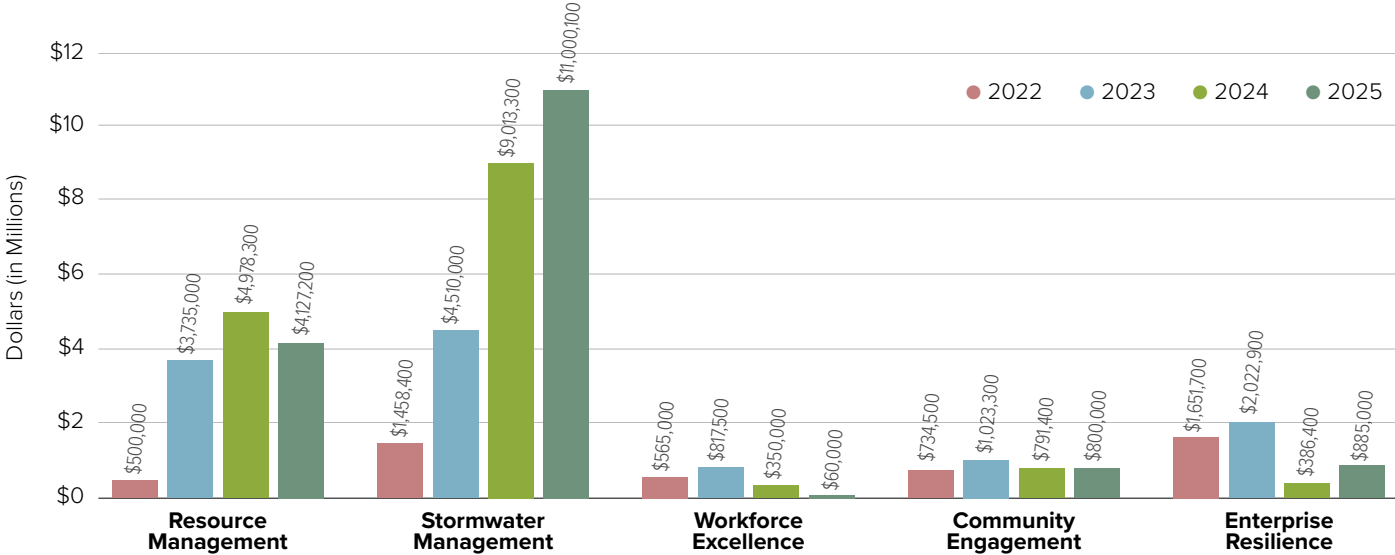
underway or have been completed. Furthermore, numerous initiatives, particularly related to Workforce Excellence and Community Engagement, are in the implementation phase or being completed and do not require additional budgetary resources.

Notably, \$11.0 million was included in the Stormwater Management Fund Management Fund for new projects to implement Strategic Plan strategies;

to expand stormwater management projects and ensure program support for all communities, regardless of local capacity. The Stormwater Program in particular has been working to maximize benefits with limited funding resources. In 2025, the MWRD funded approximately 63% of Stormwater Program project costs, with the remainder funded by grants and cost-share partnerships.

**Funds Allocated to New Strategic Goals**

The dollar amounts are funds included for new Strategic Plan initiatives each year since the plan was adopted in 2022.



## OBJECTIVE 10

# ENTERPRISE RESILIENCE:

Continuously improve business operations

**To spur continuous improvement during the plan period, the MWRD focused on innovation, tracking and transparency, and process and system enhancements.**

The MWRD defines innovation as exploring fresh approaches to operational and environmental challenges and day-to-day processes to deliver incremental or instantaneous solutions and improvements. Throughout implementation, the MWRD has worked to foster an environment that harnesses innovation and encourages employees to express new ideas. Whereas no funding was allocated specifically to innovation before the Strategic Plan, the MWRD now dedicates more than \$1 million to innovation efforts each year.

To improve transparency and accountability, the MWRD prioritized the creation of a centralized, public-facing Strategic Plan dashboard. This effort began in June 2021, driven by a need for better visualization of performance metrics and streamlined tracking of strategic goals.

In June 2023, we launched the initial version of the dashboard, which provided basic, static visualizations. However, user feedback quickly revealed critical limitations. In response, we

embarked on a comprehensive redesign focused on interactivity, automation, and user experience.

The enhanced dashboard launched in May 2024 delivers on these priorities. It features real-time data integration, intuitive navigation, and customizable visualizations, enabling both internal and public stakeholders to monitor progress toward strategic goals with ease. Updates that previously required significant manual effort are now automated, improving efficiency and data accuracy.

The effectiveness of this upgrade was affirmed in May 2025 when the dashboard was successfully updated with minimal effort, demonstrating its sustainability and long-term value.

Importantly, the dashboard's flexible framework has been leveraged to support broader applications, including operational performance tracking, internal reporting, and project oversight. This evolution reflects a growing culture of data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement throughout the organization.

*The MWRD has made a concerted effort to streamline and automate business processes and evaluate and expand on systems to enhance and/or identify and adopt replacements. Key achievements include:*

### 2022



**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.

### 2023



**Improved** security, efficiency, and coverage of wireless access points at all MWRD facilities.

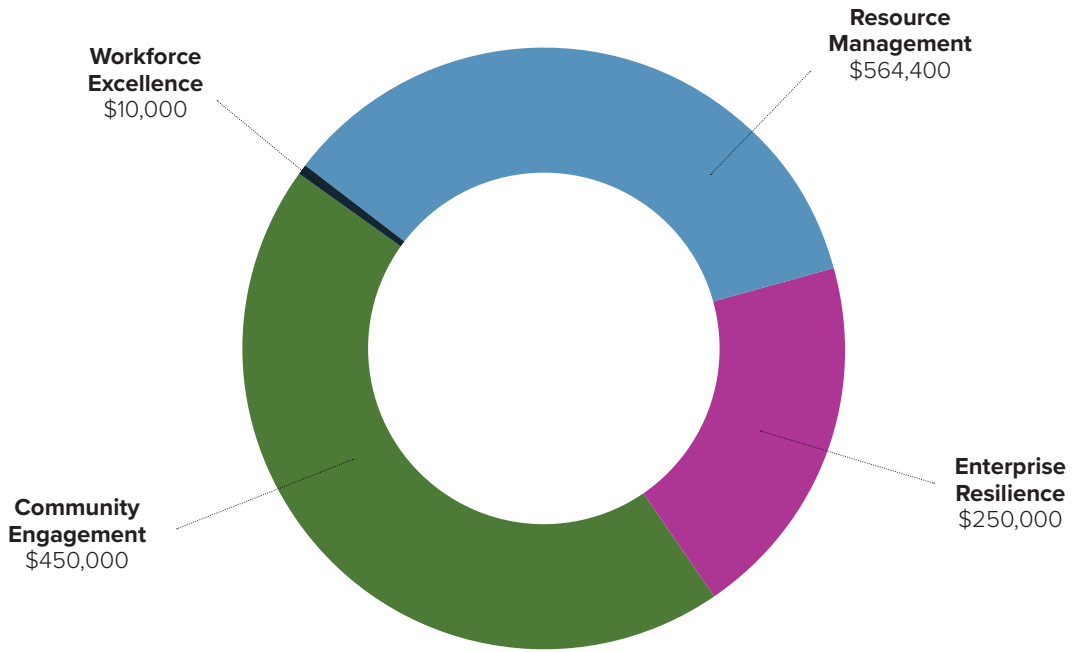


**Expanded** public engagement and accessibility to public meetings by implementing a live closed-captioning solution.



**Enhanced** vendor outreach capability in Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Procurement process.

### Funding Allocated to Innovation Projects in 2025



#### 2024



Further **automated** vendor payments and workflows through an ERP invoice processing upgrade.



**Strengthened** MWRD technology security through a newly created security operations team and sign-in requirements.



**Initiated** a feasibility RFP to redesign our Enterprise Resource Planning system to simplify use and better align with business processes.

#### 2025



**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.



**Deployed** a new modern employee access control system with centralized monitoring and enhanced security, integration, and flexibility.



**Initiated** ERP assessment project to modernize the MWRD systems and processes for the long-term.





**As the MWRD concludes its 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, area residents can take comfort in the progress made to protect our waterways, reduce flooding, support local communities, and build a more resilient future.**

From advancing clean energy and stormwater infrastructure to improving our workforce and community engagement, the MWRD has delivered meaningful improvements that touch everyday lives. These efforts reflect a strong commitment to public health, environmental stewardship, and fiscal responsibility – ensuring that our region remains safe, sustainable, and prepared for the challenges ahead.

**Planning for the 2026 -2030 Strategic Plan is in progress; for more information, visit [mwrdd.org/what-we-do/strategic-plan](http://mwrdd.org/what-we-do/strategic-plan).**

## **Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago**

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**COVERS** *Front:* An MWRD skimmer boat patrols the South Branch of the Chicago River near Ping Tom Park, protecting water quality by removing litter and small debris. *Back:* MWRD storekeepers assess parts and shipments to ensure that appropriate materials are available for a vast array of infrastructure.

