



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan retires from Board of Commissioners



MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan leads the 2020 African American History Month flag raising ceremony.

A voice of reason, a defender of the water environment, equal opportunity advocate, promoter of diversity and pillar on the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) for over 24 years, MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan participated in her last Board of Commissioners' meeting on Nov. 17 as she prepares for retirement and the celebration of naming the MWRD's downtown office building at 100 E. Erie Street as the "Barbara J. McGowan Main Office Building."

She was the first African American Vice President at the MWRD; she served as the first interim African American female President in December 2012 and December 2014; and she is the third longest serving Commissioner in the MWRD's history. She is a backbone on the Board of Commissioners, striving to provide guidance and financial oversight and establish policies and procedures in meeting the MWRD's objective of protecting the regional water environment for more than 5 million residents from Chicago and 128 surrounding municipalities. *(continued)*

MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan retires from BOC, *cont.*



Vice President Barbara J. McGowan receives a certificate from Chicago Mayor Harold Washington in 1984.



Vice President McGowan was sworn into office in 2016 by Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County Tim Evans.



Vice President McGowan with Dr. Conrad Worrill at the MWRD's 2017 African American History Month program.



MWRD Vice President McGowan with former MWRD Commissioners David Walsh and his brother Thomas Walsh in 2018.

Vice President McGowan's introduction into public service began when she volunteered for the late Chicago Mayor Harold Washington. She served as the office manager of the Political Education Project created by Mayor Washington before being elected for the first time in 1998 to the MWRD Board of Commissioners.

Vice President McGowan served with six MWRD Executive Directors: Frank E. Dalton, Hugh H. McMillan, John C. Farnan, Richard Lanyon, David St. Pierre and Brian A. Perkovich.

During her tenure, she spearheaded the celebration of African American History Month for the entire month of February and brought together such notable speakers as former U.S. Senator Carol Moseley Braun, Attorney General Kwame Raoul,

and Secretary of State Jesse White. She was also instrumental in leading the Board to recognize the MWRD's celebration of the Juneteenth holiday and recognizing the day as a holiday before the State of Illinois did. In 2020, she was inducted into the National Civil Rights Hall of Fame at the National Civil Rights Library at Mt. Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago.

"When I first started at the District, there was no celebration or acknowledgement of African American history of any sort, and I thought it was important that we remember and acknowledge our past so that we can appreciate and protect our future," said Vice President McGowan.

Vice President McGowan has been active in ensuring that minority and women (*continued*)

MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan retires from BOC, *cont.*



MWRD Vice President McGowan with Katherine Harris, aka Harriet Tubman, at the MWRD's 2020 African American History Month.



MWRD Vice President McGowan with students at the 2018 African American History Month program.



In 2022 Vice President McGowan encouraged the Board and staff to wear pink to honor those who had or are living with breast cancer.



MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan worked daily in her office.

contractors have an opportunity to perform work on MWRD contracts and are treated fairly. With the support of the Board of Commissioners, she took the lead in introducing changes to the MWRD's MBE/WBE/SBE Affirmative Action Ordinance to include penalties for contractors that violate the ordinance. She also served as a trustee on the MWRD Pension Board from 2007 to 2019 and served as Chair of the MWRD's Affirmative Action and Procurement committees and Vice Chair of Budget & Employment, Pension, Human Resources & Civil Service; Public Information & Education; and Real Estate Development committees.

In 2004 Vice President McGowan supported state legislation that enabled the MWRD to become the stormwater management authority for Cook County, and along with the Board of Commissioners,

unanimously adopted the Watershed Management Ordinance which established uniform stormwater regulations throughout Cook County in 2013.

Under Vice President McGowan's leadership, the MWRD advanced the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan through her steadfast support; approved construction of disinfection facilities at both the Calumet and O'Brien water reclamation plants; and construction of the world's largest nutrient recovery facility placed into operation at the Stickney Water Reclamation Plant in 2016.

Vice President McGowan coined the phrase "Pink It Up" in 2022 to honor those employees, like herself, who are or were afflicted with breast cancer and asked all Commissioners and staff to wear pink in support of those staff and Commissioners who are or were afflicted. *(continued)*

MWRD Vice President Barbara J. McGowan retires from BOC, *cont.*

“During her 32-year career at the MWRD, 24 of those serving as Commissioner, Vice President McGowan has been passionate for protecting the water environment,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “We owe much to her for her guidance and her trailblazing determination to make the MWRD what it is today – a diverse, resilient, committed and thriving workplace. We congratulate Vice President McGowan on an impressive career in water and thank her for her immeasurable contributions to the MWRD. We all have learned from the Vice President and wish her a happy and healthy retirement.”

Vice President McGowan has been recognized for her exemplary support and commitment to the minority, women, and small business community. She has received numerous awards, including: Cook County Democratic Women HERO Award; Austin Chamber of Commerce Better Business Award; the 2006 Public Service Award by the Federation

of Women Contractors; the 2007 Public Services Award by the African American Contractors Association; the 2009 Public Service Award presented by the Cosmopolitan Chamber of Commerce; the Coalition for United Community Force Affirmative Action Advocate of the Year Graduate Award; the 2012 Suburban Minority Contractors Millennium Builders Award; the 2012 Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council, Inc. President’s Award; the 2015 Chicago Defender Newspaper Women of Excellence Award and the Austin Voice Newspaper Walmart Community Builder’s Award for Outstanding Public Service; the MWRD Trailblazer Award for Continued Commitment to Diversity and Inclusive Opportunity; the Danny K. Davis 2017 Outstanding Leadership Award; and the National Council of Negro Women Chicago Trailblazer Award.

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