



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdd.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

For immediate release

January 7, 2021

## Commissioners elect officers to lead MWRD *President Kari K. Steele, Vice President Barbara McGowan re-elected to two-year terms, Marcelino Garcia elected as Chairman of Finance*



*From L to R: MWRD President Kari K. Steele, Vice President Barbara McGowan and Chairman of Finance Marcelino Garcia bring a range of talents, experience, perspective and passion to help govern the MWRD in protecting the region's water environment.*

The Board of Commissioners for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) has elected officers to a two-year term of leadership to help guide the agency and protect the public health and the environment as the MWRD works to manage stormwater and treat wastewater during a global pandemic.

President Kari K. Steele and Vice President Barbara McGowan were both re-elected to their leadership positions, while newcomer Commissioner Marcelino Garcia was elected by his peers as the new chairman of finance, making him the first openly gay officer to lead the MWRD. President Steele was elected to the Board of Commissioners in 2012 and re-elected in 2018 before being elected as the first African American president in the 131 year history of the MWRD 2019. She was nominated as president at the Jan. 7 Board of Commissioners' meeting by Commissioner Josina Morita, seconded by Commissioner Debra Shore and unanimously elected as president.

"I am honored to be nominated and elected by my fellow commissioners to lead the MWRD during these critical times," said President Steele. "It is the diligence and ingenuity of my fellow commissioners and staff and our collaboration that make this job rewarding to protect the citizens and health of our environment. The hard work and dedication of our staff this past year has been unmatched."

A chemist by trade, President Steele worked for more than 11 years for both the MWRD, as a water sampler and lab technician, and with the Chicago Department of Water Management before joining the Board of Commissioners. President Steele currently serves as the chairman for the Public Information and Education committees and the State Legislation and Rules Committee, and she is chairman of the MWRD Employees' Credit Union Board of Directors. She also is the vice chairman of the Engineering and Monitoring & Research Committees. *(continued)*

## Commissioners elect officers to lead MWRD, *cont.*

The longest-serving commissioner on the MWRD's Board of Commissioners, Vice President McGowan came into office in 1998, going on to become the agency's first African American Vice President and serving as the first interim African American female president in December 2012 and December 2014. Vice President McGowan was recently inducted into the 2020 class of the National Civil Rights Hall of Fame. Vice President McGowan has served as a stalwart leader and steady presence as chairman of the MWRD's Affirmative Action Committee and the Procurement Committee. In these roles, she actively works with the MWRD's Diversity Section to seek ways to ensure that minority and women contractors are treated fairly and have an opportunity to perform work on MWRD contracts. She was nominated as vice president at the Jan. 7 Board of Commissioners' meeting by Commissioner Cameron Davis, seconded by Commissioner Kim Du Buclet and unanimously elected as vice president.

"I thank my colleagues for bestowing me with this honor to serve the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago as vice president, and I look forward to a serving the people of Cook County these next two years as brighter days come in 2021," said MWRD Vice President McGowan. "Through these difficult times, our taxpayers should know we will keep working hard to deliver affordable and essential services to protect our communities."

Like Vice President McGowan, Commissioner Garcia has been a tireless advocate of affirmative action and strategies to ensure everyone has an opportunity to help the MWRD protect the region's water resources. An attorney with expertise in local and international governments, healthcare and community affairs, Commissioner Garcia is committed to providing resources to communities to support their health,

environment and the local economy. Commissioner Garcia brings a wealth of experience to the Board of Commissioners as director of community affairs for Cook County Health, the nation's third largest public health system. He is also a partner with Overseas Strategies, LLC an international business development consulting firm that helps small and medium sized companies with the logistics of import/export and market development.

Commissioner Garcia, along with Commissioner Shore and staff, are currently working on a Strategic Plan for the MWRD that will help guide the agency for the next five years, articulating the mission, vision, and strategic goals for the MWRD, while also setting initiatives to achieve goals and a framework for measuring progress. It is a momentous undertaking, and the commissioner is up to the task, having been and unanimously elected as chairman of finance at the Jan. 7 Board of Commissioners' meeting. He was nominated by Commissioner Shore, seconded by Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos, who served as the acting chairman of finance following the retirement of former Commissioner Frank Avila.

"Many years ago, when I came to Chicago, I never thought I would be a trailblazer," Commissioner Garcia said. "I hope my story as a gay Latino being elected as chairman of finance for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago can inspire young people in Cook County that dreams can happen. I thank my colleagues on the Board of Commissioners for entrusting me and placing me in this position to excel and I look forward to serving our taxpayers, the planet and humanity in general. The MWRD has a long history of doing the right thing, and I plan to continue that tradition of excellence, responsibility, reliability and innovation."

###

---

### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***

*Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at [mwrdd.org](http://mwrdd.org).*