



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Updated land use leasing criteria reaffirms MWRD's commitment to access and protection of environment and taxpayers

As one of the largest landowners in Cook County, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) plays a leading role in ensuring that its land use aligns with its many clean water initiatives to protect the environment, mitigate flooding, and respond to neighboring community needs. In keeping with that commitment, on Jan. 19 the MWRD Board of Commissioners adopted an updated list of criteria that is considered when leasing its real estate. The criteria list, which can be found at [mwrdd.org/rules-and-ordinances](http://mwrdd.org/rules-and-ordinances), was adopted following a public comment period and study session before the MWRD Board of Commissioners.

"This criteria list promotes transparency regarding the factors that are considered when making MWRD land available for lease, including local, regional, national and even global needs," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "I thank my fellow commissioners, our Law Department and MWRD staff for bringing this conversation to the forefront and making a commitment to responsible land stewardship that is fair to both the environment and our taxpayers."

Commissioners adopted the criteria list to demonstrate the multitude of factors that are considered when leasing MWRD real estate. These include compliance and consistency with the MWRD's new environmental justice policy, the MWRD's Strategic Plan and waterway strategy, and the fiscal impact on the MWRD and local municipality. The MWRD also evaluates the historical use of the land and compatibility with other local land uses, while taking green infrastructure and stormwater management into account.

The MWRD owns approximately 24,000 acres of land in Cook, Will, DuPage, and Fulton Counties in Illinois. In the process of reversing the Chicago River, the MWRD acquired significant acreage to construct and improve a 61.3 mile-system of canals and waterways. While some of that land was utilized for industrial purposes to gain access to the riverfront, the MWRD also sought ways to provide recreational opportunities, water quality improvements, and improved stormwater management for this land.

Approximately 80 percent of leased land is held by other governmental agencies, including park districts, municipalities, and forest preserve districts, for the express purpose of enhancing public access to parks, hiking and bicycle trails, and passive recreational use along the waterways. The remaining parcels are leased



*The MWRD's Sidestream Elevated Pool Aeration station improves dissolved oxygen levels in the Cal-Sag Channel, while also promoting recreation and inviting golfers and visitors to the waterfront. The MWRD makes over 8,000 acres of its property available to surrounding communities for parks and green space.*

to private parties for industrial and business purposes. In 2023, MWRD land rental revenue is budgeted at \$28 million, an increase of \$3 million from the 2022 budget, and an increase of \$6.5 million in only five years.

Our comprehensive land use policy assures that all citizens and organizations seeking to lease our land are treated equally and uniformly," said MWRD Commissioner Yumeka Brown. "Thanks to this updated criteria list, we can balance the needs of the MWRD in protecting the water environment with the needs of commerce and industry as well as municipalities, park districts and forest preserve districts striving to provide recreational opportunities."

Known famously for reversing the flow of the Chicago River and implementing the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP), or "Deep Tunnel," the MWRD today serves 5.19 million residents living across an 882-square mile area covering Chicago and 128 suburban communities to transform wastewater into clean water, recover sustainable resources, manage stormwater, and protect local waterways and Lake Michigan.

*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).*