



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

## 2021 Update to the 2015–2021 Strategic Business Plan (Updated 10/5/2020)

# Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

The District's Strategic Business Plan is used throughout the year to measure results of its service to the communities throughout its 882.1 square mile service area and communicate progress to the Board of Commissioners, staff, and taxpayers. Reviewed and updated annually, this plan serves as a guiding document until replaced by a new Strategic Business Plan.

There have been significant achievements made during this Strategic Business Plan cycle. The Tunnel and Reservoir Plan's (TARP) 7.9 billion gallon Thornton Composite Reservoir came online in 2015 and the 3.5 billion gallon McCook Reservoir Stage 1 was placed into service in 2017. These reservoirs provide over 11 billion gallons of flood protection and water quality improvements to the Chicago Area Waterway System. Also in 2015, the District received authority to recover resources from its operational processes and receive revenue to help offset treatment costs, while at the same time benefiting the treatment process.

The District developed over 100 capital stormwater projects to address regional and local flooding issues. These stormwater projects incorporate elements of both green and gray infrastructure ranging in size from massive reservoirs to green alleys and permeable parking lots. We are also completing design or construction of large regional stormwater projects throughout the county. In addition, we have dozens of active partnerships through intergovernmental agreements with local governmental organizations to address local flooding through the use of green and gray infrastructure improvements, as well as through the acquisition of flood-prone residential structures. These projects are vital to the health and well-being of our constituents.

Illinois has just experienced the wettest May on record for the third consecutive year, and we see our stormwater program as essential to creating a resilient, sustainable Chicagoland, given intensifying precipitation. The many stormwater management projects and TARP are more important than ever as we work to address unpredictable weather patterns.

The District strives to be a sustainable partner in the region by recovering resources, lowering carbon emissions, creating new revenue streams, and promoting resiliency. We replaced Imhoff Tanks with new primary settling tanks at the Stickney Water Reclamation Plant (WRP) to improve treatment, reduce operational costs, increase digester gas production, reduce odor potential, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The District produces an effective soil amendment and recovers nutrients, clean water, and energy that can be used to encourage economic job creation and add benefit to our communities. The District's real estate holdings are used to add value to the communities we serve.

The District's Mission Statement and Values continue to guide the District's future. The 2021 update to the Strategic Business Plan follows.

# Mission

The District 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. The District is committed to achieving the highest standards of excellence in fulfilling its mission.

# Values

## **Excellence**

*We believe excellence is a never-ending journey to exceed the expectations placed upon us as individuals and as an organization.* Individual excellence is exhibited by performing one's responsibilities to the best of his or her ability. We promote employee development and encourage everyone to perform at their best. Organizational excellence is obtained by continuous improvement to existing processes. Excellence at both levels is achieved through proactive, resourceful, reliable, and prudent execution of processes and responsibilities. Striving for excellence will result in continuous improvements in the way we operate and the quality of the environment.

## **Innovation**

*We seek optimal solutions to provide the best services and products available.* Innovation increases efficiency and performance by being adaptable and strategic in the face of change. Meaningful, productive change involves looking at challenges and opportunities from new perspectives and then developing and implementing new ideas to address the challenge. We embrace research as the means through which we acquire information to address challenges and take advantage of opportunities through innovative solutions. We are open to implementing new concepts and sharing what we have learned from our diverse experiences and, in the process, evolving. Embracing growth within the District's mission, we continue to be a model of wastewater treatment and stewardship of the water environment.

## **Respect**

*We create an atmosphere of open communication that rewards commitment and performance and is responsive*

*to the needs of our employees and our communities.* Respect is measured by how we treat each other and by how we value the contributions that flow from our diversity, the productivity of our relationships, and each well done job, no matter the job. Maintaining a respectful, courteous, and fair workplace allows for effective communication, heightened levels of workplace participation, and innovation due to diverse thinking.

## **Safety and Well-Being**

*We are dedicated to safeguarding our greatest assets – our employees – together with the environment and our communities.* There is always time to do it safely. We strive to provide a safe environment and improve the well-being of our employees and our communities. We continually seek new ways to improve safety performance by routinely training employees in safe operating practices and regulatory responsibilities. We incorporate safety and wellness in all planning, operations, and activities, including considerations related to the current and future pandemic. Continuously improving our safety practices will improve the well-being of our employees and the District as a whole.

## **Accountability**

*We are dedicated to fulfilling our responsibility by being accountable to our taxpayers, coworkers, and the environment.* As public service employees, we bring a high degree of integrity, professionalism, quality and caring to our work. We have a commitment to our communities to provide service with the highest level of transparency and accountability. Acting with accountability will make us a stronger organization by earning the respect, trust, and confidence of our coworkers and the communities we serve.

# Vision

The vision statement “Recovering Resources, Transforming Water” captures the changing landscape of the water industry. The District is looking to add value in traditional and non-traditional ways. This vision has produced six main goals for the organization. These goals are listed below with a descriptive statement that captures the thinking behind each goal.

- **Add Value:** Every employee at the District will look for opportunities to add value.
- **Excellence:** Excellence is not an act, but a habit.
- **Recover Resources:** The District will pursue recovery of resources for beneficial use.
- **Develop Employees:** Personal and professional growth leads to valued contributions.
- **Leading Partnerships:** We recognize the importance of active involvement in the world around us.
- **Information Technology:** It is essential for the District to have a robust and formal Information Technology (IT) governance model as needs and desired investments in IT outpace the resources available.

# Goals and Strategies

The Strategic Business Plan outlines six major goals aimed at achieving the vision of the District. Under each goal, strategies to accomplish the goal are described. Each strategy has performance measures. The measures are used to ensure efforts are achieving the desired results. During the annual strategic planning review, the measures are used to adjust the plan as needed so the District can remain focused on continual improvement.

## **Goal 1 – Add Value**

*Every employee at the District will look for opportunities to add value.* The District will be focused on adding value at every level in the organization. Each employee is challenged to add value in every interaction either internal or external to the agency. The following specific strategies have been developed to meet this goal:

**Customer Service:** Every employee's action should mindfully fulfill the customer's needs.

- Issue permits in less than 30 days;
- Utilize informed compliance to supplement the traditional enforcement business model;
- Develop and implement effective flood mitigation programs for our customers;
- Structure a multi-dimensional, culture changing strategy around green infrastructure;
- Develop and implement targeted odor control strategies.

**Real Estate:** Explore opportunities for community partnerships aimed at reducing waste and our carbon footprint and achieve other improvements in the environment.

- Work with communities to revitalize the urban forest through the "Restore the Canopy" program;
- Utilize Fulton County property as a test bed for nutrient control research and demonstration to foster partnerships with other organizations for a statewide approach to address excess nutrient discharges.

## **Goal 2 – Excellence**

*Excellence is not an act, but a habit.* Excellence should be our goal in everything we do, from meeting compliance objectives to delivering projects on time. In order to achieve excellence, the organization should focus on results. It is the measure of the results that determines the degree of success.

**Finances:** Ensure the responsible use of resources in the delivery of services.

- Continue the prioritization of projects to ensure best use of current resources;
- Provide base budget targets and assure approvals above base are tied to strategic initiatives;
- Manage resources to ensure financial stability.

**Process Evaluation:** Develop processes that are results and solutions oriented.

- Modernize and update aging infrastructure;
- Optimize energy intensive processes;
- Optimize chemical intensive processes;

- Optimize work distribution processes and workflow;
- Update the Laboratory Information Management System to improve plant data reporting;
- Replace slower, labor intensive laboratory analysis methods with more efficient and faster methods.

**Sense of Urgency:** Establish a sense of urgency in delivering community services.

- Deliver and implement a flood relief plan for Cook County;
- Sustain excellence in maintenance and operations;
- Expedite capital improvement program projects in design, bid, contract award and construction schedule.

**Performance Management:** The District will develop performance measures that reflect the contributions of staff and automatically report the organization's performance to the public.

## **Goal 3 – Recover Resources**

*The District will pursue the recovery of resources.* The District understands the obligation of every organization to implement sustainable and resilient practices. The District also understands the importance of a sustainable economy and financial base. Therefore, the District will seek opportunities to recover resources, return materials to the economy, and earn revenue to offset operation costs.

**Water:** Pursue reuse applications for the high-quality water produced at our WRPs and for the capture and reuse of stormwater.

- Explore reuse opportunities in the Kirie, Calumet, and Stickney industrial corridors.

**Phosphorus:** Recover phosphorus for environmentally friendly reuse.

- Optimize recovery process at the Stickney WRP;
- Evaluate recovery processes at the Calumet and Egan WRPs;
- Explore algae nutrient removal processes as an additional recovery resource.

**Energy:** Reduce energy consumption and increase renewable energy production.

- Maximize use of digester gas;
- Optimize aeration processes and reduce energy consumption;
- Document and seek opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint.

# Goals and Strategies (continued)

**Biosolids:** Maximize the utilization of Exceptional Quality (EQ) biosolids and compost throughout our service area.

- Develop partnerships with state and local organizations to use EQ biosolids in construction and brownfield restoration projects;
- Utilize wood chips as a feedstock for production of biosolids compost;
- Identify and take advantage of beneficial use opportunities for biosolids;
- Provide bulk distribution points at each WRP for public use, where feasible.

**Recycle and Prevention:** Promote environmental stewardship through recycling and preventative measures.

- Recycle demolition material on all District construction projects;
- Ensure disposal availability for medications and other pharmaceutical products;
- Explore opportunities for recycle partnerships;
- Maximize community outreach through event tabling, presentations, facility tours, handouts, photos, videos, and other public communication tools (media advisories, press releases, etc.) to educate the public about wastewater treatment, stormwater management, pollution prevention, and water wellness;
- Expand educational outreach by offering tours of District facilities beginning at the fifth-grade level.

## Goal 4 – Develop Employees

*Personal and professional growth leads to valued contributions.* Employees at the District are among the best in the industry. To maintain a leadership role in the water industry, the District needs to develop future leadership and pass down competencies. The District will invest in its future by investing in its employees.

- Develop and implement leadership initiatives that support succession planning;
- Develop and implement competency-based individual development plans;
- Continue to foster a culture that recognizes the value of every employee;
- Encourage employees to attend virtual seminars and training classes in place of attending in person due to pandemic conditions.

## Goal 5 – Leading Partnerships

*We recognize the importance of active involvement in the world around us.*

**Relationships:** Develop strategic relationships with constituents through active involvement in a variety of organizations and events on a local, state, and national level.

- Inventory and align professional memberships and participation;
- Participate in active leadership roles in a variety of organizations;
- Utilize our enhanced awareness from strategic relationships to make informed decisions;
- Engage in community outreach and education activities to encourage students to consider a STEM career in the water industry.

**Leadership:** Promote the District as one of the top leaders in the water industry.

- Provide active leadership in local, state, and federal water issues;
- Engage in international conversation to share best management practices.

## Goal 6 – Information Technology

*It is essential for the District to have a robust and formal IT governance model as the needs and desired investments in IT outpace the resources available.* IT security, business continuity, and compliance requirements need sensible and enforceable policies. The IT Department will focus on providing the District an appropriate balance between maintaining a secure computing environment and providing readily accessible, easy to use applications.

- Implement a modern web content management system that provides a streamlined approach for storing and delivering web content;
- Develop a framework for deploying web services and data integration technologies to streamline access to various hosted data systems and applications;
- Continue to improve upon customer service by being transparent via IT Service Management, including providing a service catalog and real-time insight into all service tickets;
- Provide a secure internet environment and implement measures to proactively prevent external infiltration and intrusion;
- Maintain and update applications to improve the user experience on the District's external facing website;
- Further develop remote network infrastructure which will allow a greater number of District employees to work seamlessly from home due to pandemic conditions.

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