



Strategic Plan

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

2025-2027

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A message from our CEO Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells

Every successful plan is a process.

A strategic plan looks back to understand the conditions, challenges, and successes that brought us to the present. It stands in the present with awareness of our needs and skills, our abilities and voices at this moment. And it looks ahead, with the best information available, to set milestones that will mark our progress in the years to come.

This is our Strategic Plan. And whether an employee, a customer, or a resident of our region, you are a part of the process.

Our 2025-27 Strategic Plan is set within a framework of five Goals to guide us and ensure that our priorities remain true. Within those goals are Objectives that help focus our work from year to year, defined more specifically in this plan as Activities.

The Plan is a product of many hands and voices. Employees from across the Sewer District participated in what you read on these pages, and their work is what moves our mission forward.

Our mission has always been bigger than one person, one project, or one plan. But together we contribute to cleaner water and a safer environment. Clean water is what we do, and who we are. This plan details how we will remain committed to this mission in the years to come.

You are part of a process that betters our region. Let's continue working together.



Our strategic framework: Vision, mission, and values

Our **vision** is to be the environmental leader in enhancing quality of life in the region and protecting its water resources.

Our **mission** is to provide progressive regional management of sewage and stormwater that protects the environment and serves our community.

Our **values** consist of accountability; balanced and informed decision-making; customer focus; environmental stewardship; equity; ethics, honesty, and transparency; progressive culture; and respect.

Accountability to accept responsibility, account for one's action, and deliver on individual and collective commitments.

Balanced and Informed Decision-Making to formulate quality decisions based on objective metrics, analysis of our systems, customer needs, safe practices, and organizational goals that include diverse opinions, ideas, and perspectives.

Customer Focus to collaborate effectively with internal and external customers when considering decisions, policies, and programs.

Environmental Stewardship to initiate and maintain effective practices of environmental sustainability through commitment to a better tomorrow, a healthy environment, and strong communities.

Equity to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, policies, and practices are embedded into our work at all levels of the organization.

Ethics, Honesty, and Transparency to maintain, as public servants, the highest standards with our customers, our business partners, and each other, including compliance with the Ohio Ethics Law and the Sewer District's Code of Ethics.

Progressive Culture to facilitate positive changes and innovation that benefit the organization, our industry, and the region while fostering a learning environment and an engaged workforce.

Respect to demonstrate a high regard and consideration for self, others, community, and the environment.







Setting the stage: Objectives and activities

When we began our 2025-27 strategic planning process in 2023, we were about to enter the final year of an already impactful Strategic Plan. Its five Strategic Areas of Focus were sound, its Objectives and Activities were specific, measurable, and tangible. Its results were unquestionable: award-winning operation, renowned community connections, a strong and diverse workforce, fiscal excellence, and project delivery at the highest level.

Where do we go from there? Even further. By recommitting to our purpose and the vital role we play in Northeast Ohio, we continue to progress.

Every Strategic Plan is rooted in our mission, vision, and values. Created more than 50 years ago to protect the water resources of Northeast Ohio, our purpose is unchanged, and our 2025-27 Strategic Plan reflects this. We remain committed to environmental leadership, and we live our values every day in how we engage with our customers and each other, working together in public service.

What this three-year plan would include and accomplish was considered by a committee of executives and directors, managers, and colleagues from across the Sewer District. As content was drafted, the committee opened the doors to hear from every employee, broadening the conversation by adding hundreds of comments and questions you provided.

That is the 2025-27 Strategic Plan you see.

Our work ahead is not only to accomplish what the Plan sets forth, but to share the stories highlighting its progress. Your work is reflected in these Goals and essential to our success.



Organizational Excellence

Continue to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our wastewater and stormwater services to protect public health, the environment, and employee safety.

A. Infrastructure - Improve and maintain the Sewer District's infrastructure.

- Manage and deliver the Capital Improvement Plan and Stormwater Construction Plan to meet organizational and financial requirements and deadlines
- Enhance project planning process to improve efficiency in wastewater operations and maintenance
- Implement years 2025 through 2027 of Project Clean Lake

B. District-Wide Operation and Maintenance - Continue to protect public health and the environment through excellent operations and cost-effective maintenance of the Sewer District's wastewater infrastructure and Regional Stormwater System.

- Meet NPDES permits, air permits, and other regulatory requirements
- Optimize and standardize Renewable Energy Facility preventative maintenance procedures and standard operating procedures to improve uptime
- Analyze and monitor water quality to meet or exceed industry standards
- Complete the identified Operation and Maintenance Standard Operating Procedures and develop a process for regular review by staff
- Evolve the focus of the Operational Readiness Group to the Plant Engineering Group
- Complete updates to the Security Department policies and Standard Operating Procedures
- Advance the focus on predictive maintenance
- Audit Sewer System Maintenance & Operation instrumentation assets and load in NexGen
- Continue to improve plant operations with the introduction of process control tools



- Evaluate return activated sludge pumping at all facilities for process and energy efficiency
- Audit, tag, and develop attributes for activities in collection system and plant preventative maintenance
- Meet the ongoing needs of industrial and commercial customers by evaluating and offering flexibility to accommodate variable discharge loads with available capacity at treatment facilities
- Continue reliance upon the Legal Department as a strategic partner to accomplish the organization's mission
- Maintain an updated strategic plan and develop the 2028-2030 Strategic Plan
- Meet the region's needs for urgent storm response with ready resources
- Maintain conveyance of the Regional Stormwater System

C. Safety - Provide a safe workplace and uphold a proactive safety culture.

- Create a District-wide Safety Strategy to maintain a continuously-improving safety culture
- Continue to clarify expectations and enhance accountability to promote safe work practices for all employees
- Advance review of and updates to Lock Out Tag Out procedures and Emergency Response Plans
- Define and track leading indicators to evaluate health and safety management system progress

D. Technology Adaptation - Explore opportunities to incorporate new technology solutions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of operations across the Sewer District.

- Explore and govern the use of machine learning and incorporate these tools into Sewer District work where appropriate
- Expand and improve the use of data analytics tools like GIS and Power BI to increase the effective use of data in decision-making
- Develop and maintain robust data systems to uphold high standards of data management and support Organizational Excellence
- Identify and incorporate new or alternative data sources to enhance accuracy, accessibility, and relevance of information
- Encourage data-driven decision-making by ensuring the system to enable effective communication and proactive management of system threats (e.g., flooding)
- Reduce complexity of the Plant Data Management System (PDMS) data transfer to improve reliability
- Continue to improve treatment process models to provide process insights





E. Cybersecurity – Protect Sewer District resources and data from cyberattacks.

- Advance implementation of the National Institute of Standards and Technology Cybersecurity Framework
- Provide regular training on cybersecurity threats and risks
- Work with WaterISAC and related cybersecurity agencies to monitor cyber threats
- Regularly test the Sewer District’s cybersecurity response and training through activities like phishing and table-top exercises
- Remediate any issues identified by audits, penetration testing, and/or cybersecurity events
- Monitor legislation related to cybersecurity and advocate on behalf of the Sewer District as appropriate







Environmental Protection and Sustainability

Set the standard for wastewater and stormwater management and business practices that prioritize environmental protection and sustainability.

F. Environmental Regulations - Continuously prepare for changes to environmental regulations.

- Prepare for the impacts of new and pending regulatory changes through research, partnerships, and coordinated action at the local, state, national, and international levels
- Determine and implement a strategy to obtain regulatory certainty for compliance with the Clean Water Act following completion of combined sewer overflow Consent Decree

G. Resilience to Climate Change - Ensure the Sewer District remains resilient amidst a changing climate of wetter, warmer, wilder weather.

- Implement actions related to climate resilience in the Sewer District's plans and programs—including the Capital Improvement Plan, Regional Stormwater Management Program, and Sustainability Plan
- Improve efforts to track and analyze historic and current data to better understand the potential impacts of climate change on Sewer District infrastructure and program delivery
- Consider climate change impacts in the design of infrastructure
- Protect Sewer District intellectual property related to developing climate change adaptation tools to ensure these tools remain publicly available





H. Sustainable Business Practices - Implement sustainable business practices to conserve resources, maximize efficiency, and explore new technologies to reduce the Sewer District's environmental impact.

- Implement the Sewer District's Sustainability Plan including activities related to:
 - Reducing energy and resource consumption
 - Determining options to increase the use of renewable electricity
 - Incorporating sustainability into project planning
 - Reporting on and reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Continue to increase the efficiency of plant operations including activities related to:
 - Considering the various methods to transfer Westerly Wastewater Treatment Plant biosolids to Southerly Wastewater Treatment Plant and increase Fluid Bed Incinerators (FBI) efficiency
 - Evaluating grit reuse methods to reduce costs and develop sustainable reuse options
 - Optimizing aeration controls at all wastewater treatment plants
 - Optimizing wastewater treatment processes for phosphorus reduction to Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River
- Maximize and promote consistent EnergyCAP use to enhance efficiency by centrally tracking utility usage and costs across all locations. Leverage EnergyCAP's advanced capabilities to perform detailed analysis of granular data, enabling deeper insights and more informed decision-making







Waste Station

COMPOST, RECYCLE, TRASH

COMPOST



- Items that can be composted:
- Food scraps
 - Popsicle sticks, tooth picks, coffee stirrs, wooden utensils
 - Napkins/paper food products

RECYCLE



- Items that can be recycled:
- Aluminum cans
 - Plastic bottles
 - Glass bottles

TRASH



- Items for the landfill:
- Chip bags/candy wrappers
 - Chewing gum
 - Styrofoam

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Customer and Community Connections

Strengthen community relationships and partnerships.

I. Community Infrastructure - Continue and expand support for Member Communities to increase the effectiveness and resilience of water-related community infrastructure.

- Deliver the Member Community Infrastructure Program (MCIP) to support communities in meeting long-term water-related infrastructure needs
- Support ongoing partnership programs like the Watershed Partner Service Agreements program, stormwater partner projects, and the Green Infrastructure (GI) Grant Program
- Analyze and/or conduct pre- and post-performance monitoring of renewed and rehabilitated infrastructure to better understand and learn from the results of community projects
- Continue providing technical assistance and support to Member Communities seeking state and federal funding opportunities
- Enhance community familiarity of and use of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's Water Pollution Control Loan Fund as a long-term funding source for capital improvement projects

J. Customer Relations - Deepen relationships with Sewer District customers by providing excellent service, reliably answering questions, and resolving problems.

- Update the Rules of Procedure and deploy Hearing Manager and Customer Ombuds functions to ensure that hearing processes are clear and understandable to customers
- Maintain and enhance the responsiveness and quality of the service provided to customers
- Manage multiple communication channels and opportunities for customers to access information and receive assistance
- Improve the customer's digital experience and usability of the Sewer District's website



K. Equity and Environmental Justice - Continue to integrate equity and environmental justice practices into the Sewer District's programs to minimize any negative consequences to our customers.

- Expand efforts to increase customer use of cost-saving programs by removing barriers, including activities related to:
 - Hosting Utility Assistance Resource Fairs that provide enhanced customer service
 - Advocating for a streamlined assistance application process across providers
 - Advertising of the cost-saving programs to increase community awareness
 - Finding automatic enrollment options when possible
- Incorporate resources such as the *Environmental Justice in Action* tool to assess community impacts as projects are planned, designed, and constructed
- Continue to develop consistent outreach messages and meaningful engagement with all communities during project planning and execution
- Maintain advocacy for a permanent federally funded low-income water assistance program

L. Public Engagement - Engage community members so they understand who we are, what we do, and why it's important.

- Host the annual Clean Water Fest
- Use numerous communications tools to expand reach to additional, diverse audiences
- Explore additional sponsorship relationships to expand impact
- Ensure all external communications are timely, truthful, thoughtful, and two-way
- Further refine presence on diverse media outlets, develop content curated for that specific outlet and related demographic
- Continue to cultivate relationships with elected officials, civic and community organizations, and regional and national leaders
- Develop a comprehensive communication strategy for rate changes that accounts for internal and external audiences and tactics

M. Advocacy and Industry Leadership - Advocate for legislative and policy actions in the best interest of the Sewer District, ratepayers, and the environment as we develop and expand local, state, and national relationships to implement and share best practices.

- Advocate for legislative, regulatory, and policy actions that align with the Sewer District's goals
- Position the Sewer District as an industry leader and subject matter expert on water-related issues through continued involvement and leadership in major water industry organizations and events
- Enhance visibility of the Sewer District's professional partnerships and collaborations with educational institutions, advocacy organizations, and research entities. Enhance communication to highlight shared initiatives, research outcomes, and best practices to showcase leadership and foster industry engagement

- Educate local, state, and federal elected and government officials on water-related issues
- Invite elected and government officials to facilities and events that highlight the Sewer District's work
- Participate in the events of elected and government officials that align with the Sewer District's mission
- Pursue funding opportunities for Sewer District and Member Community projects and initiatives







Workforce Planning, Engagement, and Investment

Invest in an inclusive, engaged, and skilled workforce.

N. Internal Communication - Improve internal communication processes to support consistency, collaboration, and engagement.

- Develop consistent tools and processes to foster effective leadership communication within and across departments
- Develop tools, training, and support for middle and front-line managers so they are well-equipped to consistently communicate information
- Investigate alternatives to all-employee meetings to increase communication and collaboration
- Continue to offer interactive experiences for employees to further their knowledge of the Sewer District
- Expand the District's multi-channel internal communication process to ensure that employees can receive information in a variety of ways
- Streamline employee surveys and determine process and protocol for future surveys and all-staff communications

O. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - Continue efforts to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion practices into the Sewer District's work so that all are treated fairly and able to participate actively as employees.

- Develop and implement the 2025-2027 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan to further embed best practices throughout the organization
- Continuously assess and refine our policies, programs, and workplace practices to remove barriers and drive equitable outcomes
- Implement the twelve priority recommendations from the Sewer District's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee, including activities related to:
 - Expand cultural appreciation days to include cultural groups that we have not recognized in the past
 - Emphasize the importance of recognition and appreciation by supervisors as a part of increasing a culture of inclusion





- Increase participation from all levels of leadership in diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings
- Establish a coaching program that supports employees in integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion concepts.
- Further incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into performance reviews through competencies and goals
- Regularly conduct listening sessions for employees to uplift feedback and concerns to senior leadership
- Continue to integrate employee feedback into strategic planning

- Increase employee understanding of how to uplift concerns at the Sewer District
- Create more structured and consistent feedback loops where employees can see the outcomes of their suggestions
- Review union and non-union performance review processes for opportunities for improvement
- Continue promoting career pathways and develop a comprehensive talent management strategy
- Continue to foster a culture of collaboration between union and management

P. Workforce Planning - Attract, engage, and develop highly skilled and motivated employees to ensure a workforce that can meet the District’s current and future needs.

- Enhance supervisor training and support, especially for new managers and front-line supervisors, so that all are equipped to manage workloads, overcomes silos, be consistent, and communicate effectively
- In collaboration with HR, develop a comprehensive workforce strategy to ensure staffing levels are appropriate to support Sewer District goals and account for anticipated staffing needs
- Refine and implement the Employee Engagement Strategy
- Expand succession planning efforts to address a wider range of positions
- Continue efforts to improve the performance management system to ensure all employees receive meaningful and constructive feedback
- Establish a comprehensive leadership development framework at all levels
- Enhance current career management and development structures that provide employees with the opportunity to shape their careers and reach their full potential in the organization

- Ensure competitive and equitable compensation and benefits, including activities related to
 - Performing regular compensation studies and enhancing comprehensive compensation guidelines
 - Evolving the Benefits Task Force to evaluate market conditions, changing needs, and expectations
 - Better communicating the benefits of working at the Sewer District
- Examine employee workload concerns to better understand the root causes and determine whether there are opportunities for the Sewer District to make improvements
- Continue to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process and support the Sewer District’s recruitment brand
- Develop a comprehensive strategy to leverage workforce pipeline programs and establish a structure for talent development and recruitment



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Financial Responsibility

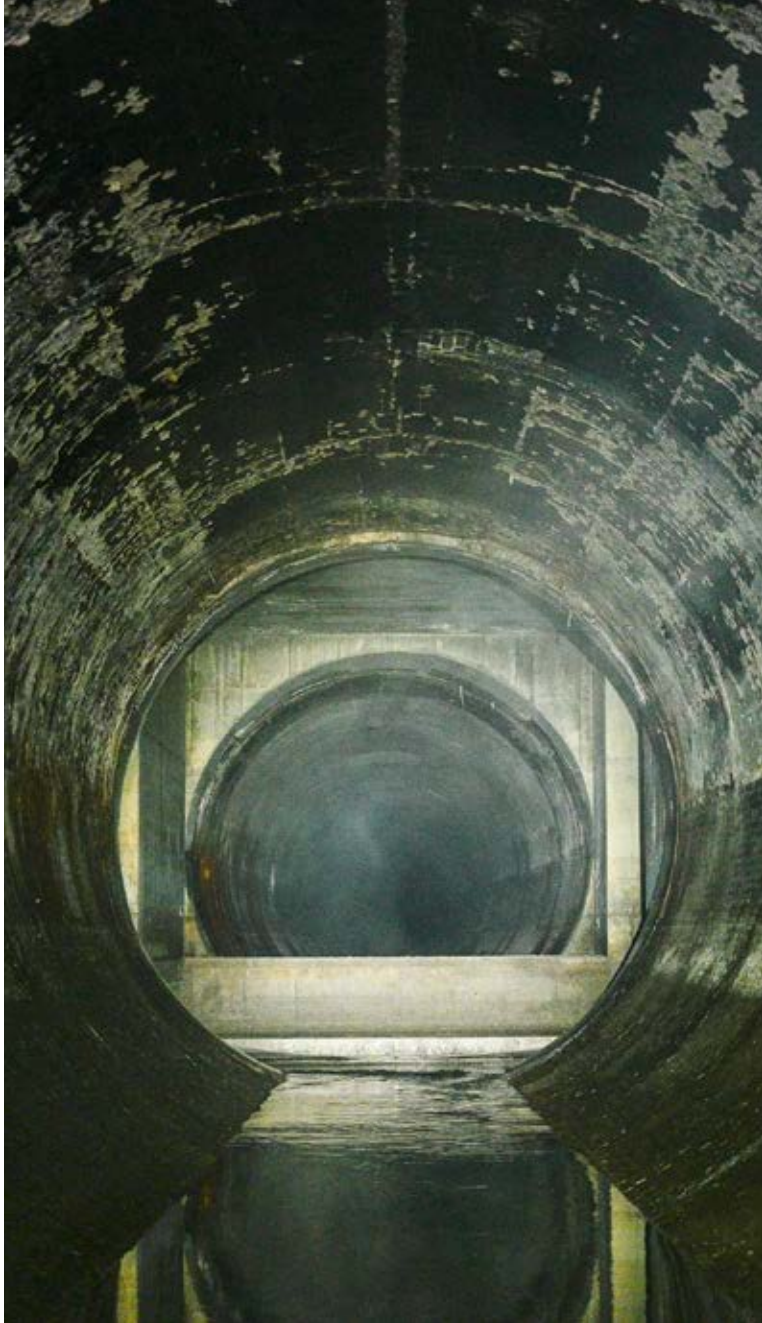
Maintain the Sewer District's long-term financial viability and minimize the financial impact on ratepayers.

Q. Customer Rates - Provide effective rate control to meet the Sewer District's obligation to ensure reliable, high-quality services and infrastructure.

- Complete the 2027-2031 rate study
- Continue analysis of optimal funding mechanisms
- Continue to explore options to diversify funding sources

R. Financial Management - Continue to maintain strong financial management and planning to ensure long-term organizational resilience.

- Meet target financial metrics
- Improve repair and renewal planning to better support capital planning and more accurately capture rate impacts
- Improve the budgeting process and tools to increase the accuracy of budget management and forecasting
- Plan and forecast finances regularly, including planning for anticipated significant expenditures under the Regional Stormwater Management Program
- Encourage a culture of fiscal responsibility by educating staff on their role in efficiently using ratepayer dollars and streamlining the checks and balances to improve efficiency
- Continue to identify efficiencies and reduce costs where possible throughout the Sewer District











Photography and design by Nicole Harvel



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neorsd.org/strategy