Strategic Plan 2025 Update

February 2022

SUFFOLK COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY

Strategic Plan 2025

In 2015, Suffolk County Water Authority created *Strategic Plan 2025*.

The 10-year plan was a coordinated effort to ensure that the Authority is prepared to meet the challenges of the next decade.

Developed by key personnel throughout the Authority, the plan provides a blueprint of our top priorities for the coming years, highlighted by the 11 comprehensive initiatives that will position the authority to maintain its place at the forefront of the public water supply industry for decades to come.

Progress Since August 2021

Suffolk County Water Authority has completed or will complete **83%** of the goals established in the plan by 2025.

Additionally, **12%** of the plan are goals that don't have a finish line, but we are making concrete and continuous improvements.

5% of the goals are considered retired because they were found not to be viable and no longer fit in our strategic outlook

Completed Goals

Customer Service

✓ Enhance bills to provide more information so customers have a better understanding of how their water consumption impacts their bill

✓ Process customer calls more efficiently by revamping the call center telephone menu and on-hold background messaging, which will include useful information about water quality, water supply and source water

✓ Improve credit card acceptance process in the field to make it easier for customers to pay bills

✓ Enhance a culture in which a "customer first" policy is employed to ensure that, whenever possible, any proposed new practice or program is first tested to demonstrate that it works effectively for Authority customers

✓ Enhance complaint tracking system to more effectively respond to customer needs

✓ Create pilot program facilitating the ability of call center staff to answer calls and assist customers from home or an alternative location during emergency situations that make the call center inaccessible

Automated Meter Reading

✓ Expedite complete installation of AMR through greater use of SCWA staff to reduce cost of project

✓ Utilize AMR-generated data to respond proactively to reverse flows and leak detections to improve service and make operations more productive

✓ Complete transition to AMR meters throughout service territory

✓ Optimize meter reading routes to avoid high seasonal and daily traffic concerns

✓ Develop AMR maintenance system with an aim of achieving 100% read success for maximum operational efficiency

Customer Growth

✓ Map current surcharge areas, areas in which private wells are in use despite the presence of water main and areas in which no water main is present

✓ Streamline process of providing cost estimates to potential customers seeking public water

✓ Dedicate an Authority employee to be the customer growth point person to develop all aspects of this plan

✓ Identify 10 areas in our service territory with both a substantial number of private wells and significant water quality issues

✓ Establish financing options for new customers that allows greater flexibility in payment schedule.

✓ Evaluate potential expansion projects to determine the suitability of the creation of water supply districts.

✓ Enhance account management on website to allow customers to review their bills and payments, past and present, as well as consumption figures and other vital information

Completed Goals

Emergency Management

✓ Develop a corporate culture that emphasizes emergency preparedness

✓ Establish Hauppauge office space as an Authority backup location for offices that are temporarily inaccessible for normal business operations

✓ Review and update assessment of critical well field sites

✓ Enhance communication with employees during emergencies

✓ Invest in 800 MHz radios to provide a reliable means of emergency. communications and ensure seamless operations during natural disasters and other emergencies.

✓ Conduct long-term vulnerability assessments of distribution system, well fields and at-risk sites.

✓ Develop protocol for general site security inspections

✓ Increase cyber security awareness and provide additional cyber security training to employees

Future Water Supply Needs

✓ Develop long-term sustainable water supply plans for Fire Island and the North and South Forks

✓ Create database of potential threats to public supply wells, tracking both point and non-point sources of contamination

✓ Evaluate potential impacts of climate change and resulting sea level rise on future supply availability

✓ Update Source Water Assessment Program maps

✓ Pilot a localized, seasonal efficiency program in capacity-stressed areas of the service territory

✓ Track and quantify the cumulative impact of adding services within pressure zones and sub-pressure zones and develop information sharing plan

✓ Establish cooperative/incentive programs for all aquifer users to sustainably manage withdrawals

Water Quality & Treatment

✓ Expand the list of pharmaceutical and personal care products for which we test by at least five new compounds

✓ Create quarterly updates of water quality complaint maps to better pinpoint the location of developing water quality issues

✓ Pilot test compliance monitoring sampling by Laboratory staff

✓ Deploy a wireless water quality monitoring station to continuously assess distribution system water quality

✓ Add source water protection component to Education Center to better educate customers

✓ Optimize chlorine storage practices at pump stations to minimize chlorate levels in distribution system

✓ Evaluate distribution system improvements for water quality including prioritizing water storage tank maintenance based on water quality issues, developing a comprehensive flushing program, eliminating dead-ends and limiting access to specified hydrants

✓ Improve current treatment or pilot test new treatment methods for emerging contaminants such as purolite resin, reactivated granular activated carbon, advanced oxidation process, hydrophobic membrane and electrolytic nitrate removal

Completed Goals

SCADA

✓ Assess available options for a wireless, high-speed SCADA communications upgrade

Employee Development

✓ Promote the Authority's commitment to developing its employees in order to attract highly capable and motivated employees.

✓ Develop program to transition those whose positions are being phased out by the implementation of new technologies to new positions

✓ Expand cross-training initiatives to include more employees and departments to further their overall knowledge of the Authority

✓ Promote a workplace culture of inclusion, respect and opportunity for all employees

✓ Establish an Employee Development Center to foster employee growth and training in order to retain dedicated and skilled employees.

Financial Strategy & Rates

✓ Maintain the lowest possible water rates, high bond ratings and a 1.5 debt service ratio

✓ Conduct new rate study plan that incorporates needs of vital infrastructure

✓ Improve collection outcomes either through legislation placing liens on properties for which bills have not been paid or through the services of an outside collection agency

✓ Assess feasibility of creating alternative rates and fee structures to fund vital projects contained within this document

Asset Management

✓ Establish inter-departmental asset management team to develop criteria for tracking assets

✓ Develop systematic program for water main replacement based on knowledge of municipal pavement schedules, information from GIS and visual inspection

✓ Develop proactive well replacement program, with clear criteria, to ensure system reliability

Workforce Technology

✓ Develop plan for the introduction of mobile workforce technology into Authority operations

✓ Initiate implementation of WiFi infrastructure in strategic locations to facilitate wireless technology initiatives

✓ Implement document imaging program in Finance to improve document management, accessibility and workflow

✓ Conduct Information Technology staff analysis to ensure proper resources are available to manage new technologies

✓ Create pilot program under which field staff utilizing mobile workforce technology would begin their workday from home in order to more quickly respond to customer calls

✓ Provide continually updated analytics generated from mobile workforce technology to optimize productivity

So, what remains to be completed?

Asset Management

- Create a centralized asset inventory database to optimize the maintenance and replacement of assets to maximize their useful life
- Create GPS mapping program of critical assets, including curb stops, valves and meters, potentially including technology to view underground water infrastructure with a handheld device
- Enhance inventory management system for warehouse and vehicle supplies
- Develop maintenance and replacement plan for every class of asset
- Enhance asset inventory database by merging it with mobile workforce management system
  - **Implementation of Clevest in Q2 2022 will complete all above goals. With Clevest we will enhance of our asset inventory management database. This data base will allow us to track asset maintenance, record device locations in the field as they are worked on, and more easily track inventory in warehouse and trucks. Once all assets can be tracked using Clevest, maintenance/replacement plans can be generated based on service records.**

- Invest nearly $1 billion over the course of the next decade to ensure that our infrastructure is capable of meeting the operational demands of present and future customers
  - **SCWA invests nearly $100 million annually to capital program, in line with our $1 billion goal**

Customer Service

- Implement backup services to assist call center in extreme emergency situations
  - **SCWA recently contracted with RingCentral to update our telephone system. The new system should enable greater flexibility for remote work. Rollout for the project is expected within the next few months.**

- Transform to a 24-hour customer service operation offering features such as automated appointment scheduling, automated customer notification of emergency situations, an updated Interactive Voice Response system, real-time account posting and live chat

  - **Interactive Voice Response and live chat features are components of the RingCentral system**
  - **Appointment scheduling is not automated but can be completed online. Once the request is received a CS clerk will review the request and create a work order. The clerk will then contact the customer via return email or by telephone**

- Provide customers with a live response option to outbound collection calls
  - **Live response option is a component of the RingCentral system**

Automated Meter Reading

- Explore partnerships with other utilities to provide Smart Metering or building an Authority full/partial Fixed Base System to provide additional consumption information
    - **Future AMI options include exploring cellular enabled endpoints. If this proves viable, it will reduce the need for additional fixed network infrastructure as the endpoint communicates directly with the cellular network.**

- Plan for next generation of automated meter technology that best fits our needs
    - **The Board approved the expansion of the "Fire Island Fixed Network Pilot Project" to include the remaining metered customers on Fire Island; approximately 1,900 meters. This project is expected to be completed by year-end 2022. Future installations of Fixed network infrastructure may be viable in other locations, but we need a better understanding of cellular enabled endpoints before an informed decision can be made.**

Customer Growth

- Develop proactive campaign to attract customers in targeted areas
  - **In January, the Board approved the hire of the first SCWA employee dedicated to attracting new customers**

- Increase customer base by 10,000 over the next decade by connecting residents who currently use private wells or through water district acquisition.
  - **Since 2015, 8,152 new customers have been added.**
  - **Since the last update in August 2021, we have added 800 new customers**

- Develop a plan to provide drinking water to all those presently being served by a private well. Included will be all aspects of infrastructure needed.
  - **Using the SCDHS Survey Areas as a priority list, we are developing targeted outreach campaigns to areas with known contamination. Springs and Manorville are the next targeted areas.**

Workforce Technology

- Implement comprehensive employee training program to ensure effective transition to new technologies
  - **Ongoing refresher training for Customer Service Field Technicians**
  - **Completed C&M Mobile Computer Training – In-Progress Field Staff Mobile Application Training**
  - **In-Progress Production Control Mobile Computing Training**

- Expand mobile workforce technology throughout the Authority
  - **Ongoing Lab Sample Collection and Facilities Field Staff next possible implementations**

Employee Development

- Create a program to retain institutional information through the use of mentoring, cross-training and availability of instructional videos.
  - **Customer Service has been working on a SharePoint site utilizing an intern to design and place content including instructional videos. Mentoring committee for Interns continues, program for all employees is in development.**

- Expand outreach to high schools and colleges to promote the Authority and its employment opportunities.
  - **Public schools have not authorized in-person visits or career fairs. With COVID cases declining and restrictions possibly being eased, we anticipate re-starting our education program outreach again and career opportunities will be added to the program for high school students. Virtual college career fairs continue to be attended by HR staff including those hosted by St. Joseph's and Stony Brook. In-person career open house is currently being scheduled for Spring 2022 in Hauppauge Education Center.**

Emergency Management

- Provide training to fire departments on vital aspects of our distribution system and hydrant function
  - **Suspended due to COVID – will resume as conditions allow**

- Continue to assess the operations and needs of departments throughout the Authority in order to develop a long- term business continuity plan to utilize during emergency situations

Water Quality & Treatment
Complete

Future Water Supply Needs

- Develop cooperative agreements with the Riverhead and Hampton Bays Water Districts to ensure supply reliability on the North and South Forks
    - **Operations is working with the legal department to create new agreements with Hampton Bays and Riverhead Water District. Additionally, SCWA has made improvements to make interchanges with both entities less frequent and now operates more like emergency interconnections.**

- Recommend potential policy changes and/or legal remedies pertaining to pollution caused by municipal road salt runoff

- Gather data on aquifer withdrawals by other users, such as agricultural interests and golf courses
    - **We are compiling information on Geothermal users. SCWA has worked to further refine locations of private well customers, including GIS based applications showing locations of private wells in and around surcharge areas.**

- Ensure a sufficient water supply for targeted customer growth areas
    - **The planned North Fork Pipeline will address future growth needs in that area**
    - **A 2.0-million-gallon ground water storage tank is under construction at Townline Rd, East Hampton. Two new wells were drilled at Bull Path in East Hampton that will come online this spring and a new pump station will be constructed. Both of these projects will provide more supply for the Easthampton area and the future additional expansion into Springs.**

Financial Strategy & Rates

- Evaluate alternative financing opportunities to ensure most advantageous borrowing terms
    - **Finance, in conjunction with the Waterworks division, continuously explores new opportunities and alternatives.**
    - **Grants/Agreements have been submitted and some grants utilized for the Authority's infrastructure - Intermunicipal Agreements, Congressional Direct Spending, WIIA-Water Infrastructure Improvement Grants, Green Innovation Grants. For the future Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (IIJA)**

- Promote rate structure modifications that see the Authority maintain and/or surpass a 50% revenue supported capital budget.
    - **In 2021, we reached 45% revenue supported capital budget with goals to exceed 50% in the future**

- Implement Success Factors Employee Central and Time module to create efficiencies within payroll
    - **Finance is in the process of implementing a new SAP module that will allow employees to access a web-based portal to update personal information, view paystubs and W2s, alter their withholding requests, and other functions that will automate the process. Current goal is to roll out the module in FY2023**

SCADA

- Pilot and evaluate chosen SCADA communications upgrade
  - **The pilot for cellular modem communications continues with two sites utilizing the cellular modem with few problems for two years now. At this point we consider cellular modems to be a viable form of communications for the SCADA system and a viable tool that can be utilized for communications without having to install a large pole and antennae. The IP Radio Pilot has progressed. We have established communications between Bay Shore and all pilot well fields in East Farmingdale. We will be working with our SCADA contractor in the next few weeks to optimize the communications and integrate the pilot radios into the existing SCADA system.**

- Implement SCADA communications upgrade
  - **See information above. Piloting in ongoing and implementation will follow.**

- Add a live link from SCADA to the hydraulic model for instantaneous distribution system water quality analysis
  - **This remains a goal, but no progress has been made**

- Add chemical level monitoring to SCADA for all pump stations to create a more efficient means of chemical replenishment
  - **This an ongoing task that occurs as the workload and budget allows. Any new installations or major rebuilds includes the addition of remote chemical level monitoring. Will not to be completed by 2025.**

- Launch SCADA dashboard to share key analytics with management without deploying the full SCADA program
  - **Recent SCADA software upgrade is being debugged. Subsequent steps will advance this goal.**

- Upgrade system of well pumpage reporting to allow easier data sharing and automated reporting
  - **Upgrades are currently in progress**