



# 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

NOVATO SANITARY DISTRICT

Prepared by: Rauch Communication Consultants Inc.



*Serving City of Novato, Including Ignacio and Bahia Areas, and Bel Marin Keys.*



**WE CLEAN THE  
COMMUNITY'S WASTEWATER**

by a modern system of pipelines,  
pumps and treatment facilities.



**WE MANAGE  
THE COMMUNITY'S  
SOLID WASTE**

through responsible  
recycling, composting  
and disposal of household  
and business waste.



**WE HAVE COMPETITIVE RATES**

Our residential solid waste trash rates are the lowest  
in the area—about 20% to 40% below what others pay  
in most neighboring communities.

Our sanitary sewer service costs are among the lowest  
in the region.

**WE RECYCLE THE  
COMMUNITY'S WATER**  
and provide it for use on pastures,  
wetlands, and landscapes.



## **Board of Directors**

Jean Mariani - President

Jerry Peters - President Pro-Tem

Dennis Bentley

Carole Dillon-Knutson

Tim Fvette, P.E.

## **Staff Leadership Team**

Sandeep Karkal, P.E., General Manager – Chief Engineer

Erik Brown, P.E., Deputy General Manager

Rachel Hundley, Esq, General Counsel/Administrative Services Manager

Jeffrey Boheim, Field Services Manager

## **Consultant**

Martin Rauch, Managing Consultant, Rauch Communications Consultants

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# Introduction

*Planning is strategic when it helps move an organization forward from its current situation to its desired future.*

## **Purpose of the Plan**

This three-year Strategic Plan is the highest-level planning document for Novato Sanitary District (NSD) and represents the Board's and Staff's direction for the future. The Plan identifies the District's mission, vision, and core values while establishing a set of goals and objectives that serve as a framework for decision-making.

The Plan is also a practical working tool that provides clear direction to Staff regarding the Board's goals and objectives. The Board and Staff will regularly refer to it as a guide to the District's actions during the period covered.

## **Plan Development**

**Background Research.** The consultants began by holding discussions with the Board President and General Manager.

**Confidential Interviews.** Next the consultant carried out a series of confidential interviews. The goal was for the interviewees to candidly express their interests and perspectives on the District and its priorities. The interviewees included the Board of Directors and Leadership Team (including the General Manager).

**Strategic Planning Workshop.** The interviewees also participated in a workshop led by the consultant. At the workshop, the group reviewed the interview results, took part in exercises to assess the District's current state, identified issues and opportunities the District expects to confront in the future, and discussed priorities.

**Staff and Board Work.** Drawing from the interviews, workshop, and other information, the consultant, General Manager, and Leadership Team developed a draft Strategic Plan.

**Second Strategic Planning Workshop.** The draft was distributed to the Board and Leadership Team. At a second workshop, the participants reviewed, discussed, and refined the draft Plan, including the mission, vision, and values, and provided direction for additional changes.

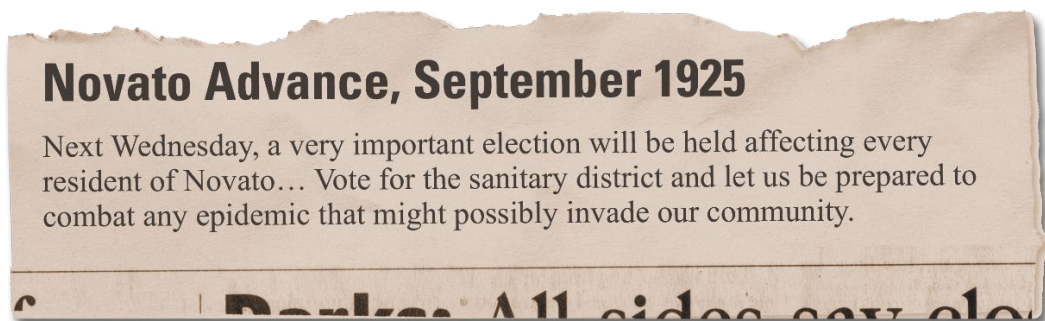
**Implementation Phase.** The General Manager and Leadership Team will implement the Plan in the coming years.

# Founded 99 Years Ago to Serve Our Community

*As a special district, Novato Sanitary District (District) is an independent local agency with a publicly elected board of five directors, currently serving about 60,000 residents. The District's primary responsibilities include wastewater collection and treatment, water recycling, and solid waste collection and disposal.*

Below are a few selected highlights in the history of Novato Sanitary District:

- The District was originally chartered on October 5, 1925, as Marin County Sanitary District No. 6.
- Prior to 1949, the community of Novato met its sewage disposal needs by using individual septic tanks and leach fields.
- In 1949, The District built a collection system and a primary treatment plant.
- In 1954, a \$450,000 bond measure was passed to improve the Novato treatment plant and increase its capacity to 2 million gallons of wastewater per day, and an assessment district was created to build the Ignacio treatment plant.
- In 1986, a major upgrade was completed to increase the capacity and treatment capabilities of the Novato and Ignacio plants, to better serve the increasing capacity needs of the growing community. The upgrade also helped meet the more stringent Federal and State standards of water pollution control.
- In 2011, a new, modern treatment plant was put into service, replacing the two aging treatment facilities. The new plant was elevated to address sea level rise and combines the capacity to meet future needs with a reduced carbon footprint and lower greenhouse gas generation through greater energy efficiency. It is performing better than required, easily meeting strict environmental and water quality mandates.



Local citizens held an election to form the District in 1925 and “clean up the filth and unsanitary conditions” at the time. The vote was 46 to 37.

# Strategic Framework

*Novato Sanitary District built the Strategic Plan from a series of logical and integrated components described below.*

**Mission.** The mission statement explains why the organization exists. It articulates the organization’s essential work in a brief sentence or two.

**Vision.** The vision articulates what the organization will become at a given time in the future. It is the strategic target that, when achieved, fulfills the organization’s mission. As such, it is at the heart of the strategic planning process.

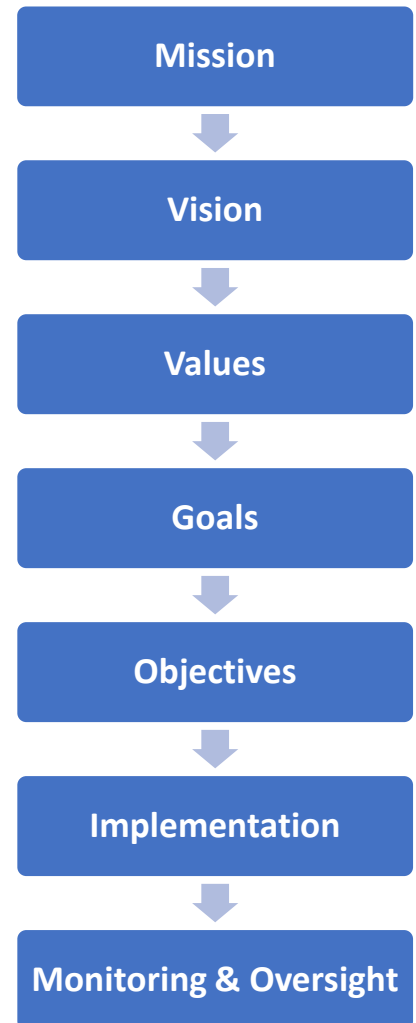
**Values.** Values provide guidance when an organization is faced with challenging decisions that require trade-offs, help govern attitudes and behaviors, and generally remain constant over time. The Board sets values.

**Goals.** Goals describe broad, primary areas of management, operations, and planning that must be addressed to accomplish the mission. Goals are not connected to timelines.

**Objectives.** Objectives are specific directions established by the Board, which expand upon and refine the goals. There may be multiple objectives for each goal. Objectives are related to goals but are more specific, measurable, and attainable, and have a time frame.

**Implementation Phase.** The Implementation phase includes tasks/actions required to accomplish the mission, goals, and objectives through the annual budget process. The Tasks/actions in the Plan are assigned to members of the Leadership Team and have timelines. There may be multiple tasks for each objective.

**Reporting, Monitoring, and Oversight.** These are actions that will be taken by the Board, Leadership Team, and Staff to ensure that the Plan is implemented and updated over time.



# Mission and Vision

## Mission

Novato Sanitary District provides high quality, environmentally responsible, and cost-effective wastewater and solid waste resource management for Novato.

## Vision

An experienced and well-prepared team that collaborates extensively with both public and private partners to deliver excellent public services and cost savings to our community.

**Prepared.** The District is forward-looking and flexible, always prepared for new challenges and opportunities and adapting readily to change.

**Excellent.** From facilities and operations to staffing, administration, outreach, and beyond, the District strives for excellence.

**Engaged.** We collaborate with public and private organizations to provide mutual benefits for our customers and partners.

**Clear.** We listen carefully and communicate clearly and openly with our customers, partners, and community.

**Experienced.** We are the employer of choice in our industry and have a stable, capable, innovative Staff dedicated to serving our community.



# **Big Picture View of the Strategic Direction**

*Novato Sanitary District's highest priority, strategy, and new direction are summarized below.*

## **Our Highest Priority**

**Provide Continued High-Quality Wastewater and Solid Waste Services.** In the coming five years, the District will continue to improve upon its history of protecting public health and the environment through continued high-quality water and wastewater services.

## **Our Strategies**

**Continued Focus on Partnerships, Collaboration and Communication.** The District has a long tradition of engaging in collaborations and public / private partnerships to improve its effectiveness and lower costs. For example: managing its treatment plant through a contract with Veolia; collaborating on recycled water with North Bay Water Reuse Authority and North Marin Water District; public education with Wastewater Treatment Agencies of Marin County; a collaborative safety program; and more.

**Avoid Complacency, Regularly Assess Changing Needs, Actively Plan For The Future, And Be Prepared For Contingencies.** The District provides high quality services and maintains relatively low rates. Its successes have partly been due to long-range planning, adapting to changing circumstances and being prepared to find and take advantage of opportunities that develop — strategies that the District will remain vigilant in implementing.

**Maintain a Highly Trained, Experienced, Motivated and Stable Staff.** The District has an excellent Staff but maintaining that over time will require additional attention to hiring, retention, Staff training and development, succession, and culture.

## **Areas of New and Increased Focus**

**Additional focus on all the elements needed to hire, develop, and retain a highly trained, experienced, motivated, and stable Staff.**

**Beneficial Reuse of Biosolids** — New and increased focus on developing and implementing a long-term, sustainable, and cost-effective method or methods of beneficial reuse of biosolids from the wastewater treatment process.

## **Goals, Objectives, and Implementation Phase**

*These are introductory notes to the strategic goals and objectives described on the following pages.*

**Key Areas of Change.** This Strategic Plan focuses only on critical areas where the Board has signaled a change or a desire for additional clarity. This District has many existing and ongoing initiatives, programs, and actions that are not incorporated into this Plan.

**Timing.** Goals and objectives marked “annually” or “ongoing” will be reported at least once yearly. This will allow the General Manager-Chief Engineer to use the feedback received from the Board when preparing the new fiscal year budget.

**Implementation.** Staff will develop the implementation tasks after the Board reviews and approves the goals and objectives.

## **GOAL 1. STAFF: A Motivated, Qualified, and Stable Workforce.**

**Strategic Challenge.** The District has an experienced and capable Staff and offers competitive pay. However, like many organizations today, it faces several staffing challenges: intense competition for qualified people, lean staffing with limited backup capacity, workplace changes such as hybrid work and flexible work schedules, the lack of affordable local housing, and long commutes from more affordable areas.

**Strategic Response.** Ensuring that the District hires and retains an excellent workforce, has effective succession plans, and is recognized as an employer of choice will be an ongoing priority of Staff with the Board's full support.

*The following objectives and implementation actions must be completed to fulfill Goal 1.*

OBJECTIVE 1.1: As an employer of choice, the District attracts and retains qualified and experienced Staff needed to meet District needs.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: The District's succession and knowledge retention efforts ensure smooth transitions during staffing changes.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: Job seekers in the region are choosing jobs in our industry as a result of workforce development collaboration that the District has participated in.

## **GOAL 2. FACILITIES: Efficient and reliable facilities are proactively maintained and replaced to ensure long-term cost-effectiveness.**

**Strategic Challenge.** NSD owns a modern, award-winning treatment plant and a recycled water plant. The District’s extensive system of collection and transmission pipelines and pump stations has been substantially rehabilitated over the past two decades. The District’s facilities are well-maintained and reliable. However, there are challenges that require attention in the major facilities and systems maintained by the District:

Wastewater Collection System. Wastewater systems are subject to corrosive conditions and need ongoing maintenance, as well as renewal and replacement.

Treatment Plant. Constructed in 2011, the District’s treatment plant is still relatively new, but it is old enough to start needing additional maintenance, and, over time, increasing levels of renewal and replacement of equipment and subsystems.

Reclamation Area. The District maintains over 800 acres of pasturelands and wildlife ponds where it reclaims a substantial amount of wastewater and spreads and composts solids from the treatment process. While this disposal system is cost-effective and ecologically smart, the District needs to be prepared address alternatives due to emerging regulatory requirements; the need to develop more advanced biosolids disposal; numerous aging facilities, and; risks to access roads from a planned raising of Highway 37.

Power. The need to expand backup power systems to manage potential Pacific Gas and Electric (PGE) power cutoffs of up to 10 days and the District’s desire to develop green power sources.

Vehicle Electrification. Vehicle electrification mandates with few or no available feasible options, and continued supply chain problems for construction materials and equipment.

Household Hazardous Waste Facility. The household hazardous waste facility is within Recology’s recycling center, limiting the District’s flexibility and long-term control of the facility. It is also undersized to meet long-term needs and its days of operation are limited due to recycling center needs.

**Strategic Response.** The District will continue to proactively manage its facilities maintenance, renewal, and replacement for long-term service quality and cost-effectiveness.

*The following objectives and implementation actions must be completed to fulfill Goal 2.*

**OBJECTIVE 2.1:** The District periodically updates its analysis of how it manages all its systems, including the treatment plant, collection system, reclamation facilities, and household hazardous waste facilities.

**OBJECTIVE 2.2:** District facilities are managed for high long-term reliability and cost-effectiveness.

OBJECTIVE 2.3: Long-term, proactive solutions to the reclamation area-related uses and challenges are in place and ready to be implemented in time to be cost-effective.

OBJECTIVE 2.4: The District periodically evaluates green power options as the market and technology evolve and considers viable options for implementation.

OBJECTIVE 2.5: The District is prepared to mitigate identified and potentially significant incidents and threats (fires, power outages, water shortages, earthquakes, cyber-attacks, climate change, pandemics, etc.).

### **GOAL 3. ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE: An efficient, effective, sustainable organization that continually improves.**

**Strategic Challenge.** NSD has earned the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) Platinum Peak Performance Award 11 years in a row, placing its treatment plant in the top 1 percent of plants in the country. In finance, Novato Sanitary District has earned the prestigious Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting (CAFR) from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) of the United States and Canada for nine years running. The District’s AAA S&P Credit Rating and competitive rates are two more indicators of the District’s strong financial performance.

However, the quest for excellence is never complete. For example, the District relies on inefficient paper processes for permitting, purchasing, and other administrative activities. The District has gradually improved its IT and cybersecurity efforts, but work remains to be done. NSD’s excellent treatment plant is now over a decade old and will require renewal and replacement over time. Meeting the District’s long-standing focus on achieving zero accidents, zero sanitary sewer overflows, zero waste (100% reuse), and zero permit violations—will require ongoing commitment and effort.

While the District has been a pioneer and leader in recycling, waste diversion and household hazardous waste programs, it can do more. These programs can improve by expanding organic diversion and reduction, collaborating with public and private agencies to provide edible food collection and ensuring the household hazardous waste collection facility is adequate for future growth of the community.

An important tool the District has used to strive for excellence is long-term planning, which for NSD began with the publication of its first Strategic Plan in 2002. As the operating environment continues to evolve, the District seeks to stay ahead of resulting changes. Over time, the District will be called on to develop new processes and systems to collect and treat waste while complying with new regulations and meeting community and environmental needs safely and reliably. As state and federal regulators address new challenges by creating and enforcing new and stricter regulations, NSD must have the facilities, Staff, and resources in place to adapt and evolve in a timely and economic manner.

**Strategic Response.** Novato Sanitary District will strive to perform with excellence in matters such as governance, finance, safety, reuse, and use of technology. The District will use thoughtful, long-term planning but will remain flexible and adaptable as circumstances change.

*The following objectives and implementation actions must be completed to fulfill Goal 3.*

OBJECTIVE 3.1: The Board periodically self-evaluates and implements identified areas of improvement.

OBJECTIVE 3.2: The District leverages technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

OBJECTIVE 3.3: Long-term planning ensures that the District can meet future financial needs.

OBJECTIVE 3.4: Excellent financial reporting allows the Board to clearly understand current finances and long-term needs and trends.

OBJECTIVE 3.5: The District continues to progress on its “zero targets” of zero accidents, zero sanitary sewer overflows, zero waste (100% reuse), and zero permit violations.

OBJECTIVE 3.6: Always forward-looking, prepared for the future and adapting to change.

OBJECTIVE 3.7: The District continues to be a leader and collaborative partner in sustainable, cost-effective solid waste, recycling, composting, and related programs.

## **GOAL 4. OUTREACH Engaged, Collaborative, and Communicating Well.**

**Strategic Challenge.** The District has long maintained an outreach program and participates in community events. In addition, the District collaborates extensively with its neighbors on recycled water, joint safety programs, and a formal pollution prevention and minimization program that includes extensive education and public information programs. Other collaborations include a contract with Veolia to manage the treatment plant and a franchise with Recology to handle solid waste. Communication and collaboration are identified as areas of continued focus to ensure the public can understand and support the District in an increasingly complex world and can obtain the information they need to help the District protect the environment through lateral replacement programs, recycling, safe household hazardous waste (HHW) collection and disposal, and similar initiatives that the public participates in. Collaboration is critical; the District has seen that it can provide mutual benefits and better service at lower costs by working effectively with others.

**Strategic Response.** Partnering and collaboration will remain important strategies enabling NSD to provide quality, cost-effective service. The District will continue and enhance its outreach and communication to ensure the public has the information it needs and desires about the District's programs and activities.

*The following objectives and implementation actions must be completed to fulfill Goal 4.*

OBJECTIVE 4.1: Mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships are actively developed and maintained with both public and private entities.

OBJECTIVE 4.2: There is broad understanding and support for the District and its activities among both the public and key stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE 4.3: The public understands the services the District provides, where to learn more, and how to get their questions answered.

OBJECTIVE 4.4: The District provides prompt, responsive service to customer needs and requests.



# **Monitoring, Reporting, Oversight, and Accountability**

## **Communicate and Lead**

Publish the mission, vision, goals, and objectives on posters and handouts and display them where they are visible.

Incorporate the Mission, Vision, Goals, and Objectives into the employee handbook and orientation and training materials for new employees and Board and Committee members.

## **Clarify Roles and Expectations**

Build Strategic responsibilities into job descriptions for the Staff Leadership Team so each team member knows what initiatives and objectives they are responsible for driving forward or contributing to.

Build accomplishment of strategic priorities into performance reviews for the General Manager and Leadership Team.

## **Allocate Resources to Meet Strategic Objectives**

The District's annual budget reflects strategic goals and objectives.

Hiring practices reflect strategic goals and objectives.

## **Board Oversight and Monitoring**

Staff reference agenda packet Staff reports when an item fulfills a particular goal and objective.

The Board and Board committees are mindful of the Strategic Plan goals and objectives when deliberating.

## **Review the Plan**

Every year, the Board holds a brief workshop early in the budget development process to review progress on the Strategic Plan and consider, with the help of a facilitator, making appropriate adjustments to the Plan.

Staff updates implementation-related tasks as appropriate over time.

# Single-Page View of the Core Elements of the Strategic Plan

MISSION	Novato Sanitary District provides responsible, environmental, and economical wastewater and solid waste resource management for Novato.			
VISION	Excellent		Prepared	
GOALS	<p><b>1. STAFF: A Motivated, Qualified, and Stable Workforce.</b></p>	<p><b>2. FACILITIES: Efficient and reliable facilities are proactively maintained and replaced to ensure long-term cost-effectiveness.</b></p>	<p><b>3. ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE: An efficient, effective, sustainable organization that continually improves.</b></p>	<p><b>GOAL 4. OUTREACH Engaged, Collaborative, and Communicating Well.</b></p>
OBJECTIVES	<p>1.1: As an employer of choice, the District attracts and retains qualified and experienced Staff needed to meet District needs.</p> <p>1.2: The District’s succession and knowledge retention efforts ensure smooth transitions during staffing changes.</p> <p>1.3: People in the region are choosing jobs in our industry as a result of workforce development collaboration that the District has participated in.</p>	<p>2.1: The District periodically updates its analysis of how it manages all its systems, including the treatment plant, collection system, reclamation facilities, and household hazardous waste facilities.</p> <p>2.2: District facilities are managed for high long-term reliability and cost-effectiveness.</p> <p>2.3: Long-term, proactive solutions to the reclamation area-related uses and challenges are in place and ready to be implemented in time to be cost-effective.</p> <p>2.4: The District periodically evaluates green power options as the market and technology evolve and considers viable options for implementation.</p> <p>2.5: The District is prepared to mitigate identified and potentially significant incidents and threats (fires, power outages, water shortages, earthquakes, cyber-attacks, climate change, pandemics, etc.).</p>	<p>3.1: The Board periodically self-evaluates and implements identified areas of improvement.</p> <p>3.2: The District leverages technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness.</p> <p>3.3: Long-term planning ensures that the District can meet future financial needs.</p> <p>3.4: Excellent financial reporting allows the Board to clearly understand current finances and long-term needs and trends.</p> <p>3.5: The District continues to progress on its “zero targets” of zero accidents, zero sanitary sewer overflows, zero waste (100% reuse), and zero permit violations.</p> <p>3.6: Always forward-looking, prepared for the future and adapting to change.</p> <p>3.7: The District continues to be a leader and collaborative partner in sustainable, cost-effective solid waste, recycling, composting, and related programs.</p>	<p>4.1: Mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships are actively developed and maintained with both public and private entities.</p> <p>4.2: There is broad understanding and support for the District and its activities among both the public and key stakeholders.</p> <p>4.3: The public understands the services the District provides, where to learn more, and how to get their questions answered.</p> <p>4.4: The District provides prompt, responsive service to customer needs and requests.</p>



## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Jean Mariani – President

Jerry Peters – President Pro-Tem

Dennis Bentley

Carole Dillon-Knutson

Tim Fvette

Prepared by:



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