



Washington County Service Authority

Strategic Plan

2025-2029



Washington County Service Authority's Strategic Plan

Washington County Service Authority (WCSA) established the strategic planning process to document an organizational roadmap for guiding the utility into the future. The strategic framework presented in this document will help guide investments, allocate resources, and ensure that every level of our organization is aligned and can positively impact our business's performance.

Past

Washington County Service Authority is a significant part of Washington County's history. Our roots go back to 1902 when water was first pumped into a Damascus home. Eight years later, WCSA's forerunner, Abingdon Water and Light, was founded to provide reliable utility services to many more customers. We saw significant growth as part of the Works Progress Administration, an ambitious employment and infrastructure program created by President Roosevelt in 1935 during the bleakest years of the Great Depression. WCSA has grown further as the result of the consolidation of no less than 17 private and public utilities countywide. And, since 1996, WCSA has invested more than \$120 million in infrastructure.

Present

Today, WCSA provides approximately 94% of existing county residents (22,274 connections) with a safe, dependable supply of drinking water from multiple sources. WCSA utilizes a 900-mile network of pipelines, 2 water treatment plants, 4 springs, 24 water storage tanks, 28 pumping stations, 50 pressure zones, and 1,748 fire hydrants. An environmentally safe water reclamation service, utilizing 200 miles of pipeline and 29 pumping stations, provides wastewater to 2,400 connections. Recently we completed a water line extension project – a \$6.7M infrastructure project – to provide clean drinking water to more than 60 customers in the Mendota area. WCSA's maintenance team have replaced water lines and installed water line extensions throughout the county and over the past year we have realized significant cost savings by doing this work with in-house assets. WCSA is underway with our Lee Highway Corridor Sewer

Improvements Project. Completion of this \$33M infrastructure project will provide the collection system backbone for more than 1,000 customers to connect to public sewer.

Future

Examining the future WCSA's opportunities include continuing to meet the needs of an aging water system, recruiting and retaining employees, continuing to make financially sound decisions with our resources, improving internal and external communications, leveraging technology to support effective operations, and, as we have done for more than 100 years, growing where feasible and desirable to improve the standard of living in Washington County.

WCSA's Board of Commissioners (Board), management team, and staff developed this strategic plan to provide a foundation for meeting these challenges. The strategic plan acknowledges the challenges and provides a road map for future growth and improvements. Just as important, it allows us to share our plans with our employees, customers, local agencies, organizations, and regulators. We believe this plan is an important tool for concentrating our energies on our business goals while assessing how we are doing and where help may be needed. Our strategic plan will support current and future leaders and employees in making the best decisions that will continue WCSA's positive impact on promoting growth in Washington County.

The Lee Highway project is anticipated to be completed in **early 2025** and will provide opportunities for economic growth and public sewer in the west-central portion of Washington County.



Industry Trends and Organizational Management

The services provided by WCSA are central to assuring a sustained vitality of the service area. To achieve continued success, WCSA must address several national and state-wide trends of particular significance for the organization as it works to update and implement its strategic plan. These include meeting future regulatory requirements and changes in usage patterns. These, and other challenges, must be considered to adequately plan for the utility's future.

WCSA is focused on Organizational Management that includes leading the Authority in a collaborative manner that empowers and develops our current and future workforce; promotes economic development that improves the standard of living in Washington County; and works with partner jurisdictions to provide a sustainable source of water and wastewater service for the greater regional area.

Population

The WCSA service population has increased at a rate of approximately 1% per year since 2019, while the number of new service connections increased by 2%. WCSA has invested to maintain and strategically replace aging infrastructure. WCSA will continue to work with neighboring utilities to support regional growth opportunities. WCSA will pursue growth opportunities in support of Industrial recruiting efforts or extending service to previously unserved citizens.

Political Environment

The WCSA Board is appointed by the Washington County Board of Supervisors for four-year terms. The Board is actively engaged with WCSA to provide additional insight and guidance. WCSA collaborates with the Industrial Development Authority, Washington County Board of Supervisors, Town of Abingdon and other local government agencies to plan for and support economic development activities in Washington County. WCSA engages with multiple funding agencies including USDA Rural Development, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Department of Health, and others to support economic growth. WCSA conducts a cost benefit analysis for new service extensions and facilities to ensure financial viability. WCSA will continue to focus on and invest in feasible and sustainable growth that improves the standard of living in Washington County.

Regulations

Like utilities across the nation, WCSA faces increased regulation and enforcement, particularly for water treatment, which impacts rates, operations, and capital budgets. WCSA's treatment plants consistently operate to our internal standards that are a level above compliance, earning us the Gold Award from Virginia Department of Health for thirteen years. WCSA is partnered with our local regulatory agencies to prepare for future regulations concerning PFAS, lead and copper, and source water protection. These future regulatory changes will require capital investments in new treatment processes, and new technology to monitor and control. WCSA will continue to challenge our workforce to reduce costs to allow us to invest in new technology that serves our customers with safe, clean drinking water and wastewater treatment. WCSA will continue to engage regulatory agencies to comprehend potential new regulations and plan for the required new technology. WCSA will communicate with the public to ensure our customers understand the impact of new agency regulations.

Technology

WCSA strives to leverage the latest in affordable technology to better serve our customers. We have recently finished security upgrades that allow us to better safeguard water sources and our assets. We have also upgraded our phone systems to provide a better customer experience and less wait times. For the future we are looking to provide an outage map and to streamline our notification (alert) systems for events such as precautionary boil water notices. We also plan to implement an integrated work order system and vehicle tracking software to make repairs more efficient.

Workforce Challenges

WCSA has a dedicated and experienced workforce. The water and wastewater industries are driven by new technology to provide safe, clean, and affordable drinking water to all residents. WCSA employees continuously evaluate advances in technology to leverage operational benefits in efficiency and cost.

WCSA is dedicated to:

- Attracting new talent
- Training employees on the latest technology and regulations
- Understanding skills gaps
- Engaging employees
- Succession planning
- Developing standard operating procedures (SOP)

Customer Expectations

WCSA has considerable face-to-face interaction with its customers, so customer-facing technology should be intuitive, informative, and easy to navigate. Customers expect quality water and wastewater services at a stable and competitive cost, therefore, WCSA must have efficient operations and make strategic investments in infrastructure to provide competitive rates. WCSA must establish resources to reinforce customer trust and expand customer communications.

Utility Financial Constraints

WCSA, like all entities, is faced with financial constraints. We must make difficult financial decisions daily. These decisions are centered around service extensions, repairs to our infrastructure, investments in equipment, tools, and technology, and the costs of running our facilities. Because of this, we place the upmost importance on our use of financial resources to ensure that we can continue to provide essential services to our customers.

Energy and Environmental Impacts

WCSA has access to plentiful but expensive energy, and energy will likely remain a significant portion of WCSA's operating expense. WCSA manages water and wastewater transport across significant elevation changes, which is energy intensive, requiring pumping and pressure-reducing stations. It is extremely important that we continue to explore energy efficiency upgrades and optimization opportunities. We must continue to evaluate new and emerging technology to improve efficiency throughout the organization.

Increased Risk Profile

WCSA can be adversely affected by weather and climate patterns. We also have challenges with unintentional damage caused to our infrastructure by contractors or other utility workers. WCSA has a risk management strategy that is continuously updated. The newest and possibly the largest threat to WCSA and our customers are cyber-attacks. WCSA has invested a significant amount of time and resources to securing our operations and systems against cyber threats. We leverage our internal resources as well as work with our IT partners to ensure that we have the technology and processes in place to protect our operations and our customers.

SOAR: Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results

WCSA utilized a Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) analysis to form the basis for its strategic plan.

S	O	A	R
Strengths Trained, experienced employees Water quality Customer service Reliability Teamwork Financially stable Safe work environment	Opportunities Infrastructure Security Communication Technology Growth and expansion	Aspirations Continuously improve Provide a dependable, high-quality product Be best-in-class Community outreach Environmental advocates	Results Regulatory compliance Technology adoption and integration Employee engagement Safety compliance Achieve goals / objectives Infrastructure reliability Financial strength

Strategic Planning

Our strategic planning is an ongoing organizational process of using available knowledge to document our intended direction for our business. WCSA utilizes this process to prioritize efforts, effectively allocate resources, align stakeholders and employees with the organization's goals, and ensure those goals are backed by data and sound reasoning.

One significant benefit of strategic planning is that it creates a single, forward-focused Vision, Mission, and Values for our business that generates an increased sense of responsibility throughout our organization. By planning our business's strategy and defining our goals, key performance indicators (KPIs) can be determined at the organizational level. These goals can then be extended to business units, departments, teams, and individuals. This ensures that every level of our organization is aligned and can positively impact our business's KPIs and performance.

Vision

Ultimately, implementation of this plan will enable WCSA to achieve its desired future state as articulated in its Vision, which is: ***"To be the trusted public utility and community leader in Southwest Virginia."***

Mission

The Mission describes the organization's purpose and role within the service area. After carefully considering these factors, the Core Team stated: ***"WCSA's dedicated employees lead the industry and the region by providing excellent, affordable, environmentally responsible water and wastewater service."***

Values

Values articulate WCSA's deeply held beliefs, norms, and qualities, which drive day-to-day activities. WCSA's values are:

- Integrity
- Trust
- Accountability
- Dependability



Strategic Initiatives

Infrastructure

Maintain reliable infrastructure to meet or exceed the needs of our customers

WCSA is proud of its work on existing infrastructure systems and the new infrastructure under construction. A continued focus on developing and maintaining a sustainable infrastructure that meets customer needs, now and in the future, will be critical to success.

Strategies

1. Integrate technology and asset management to support business decisions
2. Ensure that all Authority distribution and collection systems infrastructure is properly sized and within its expected life
3. Update and maintain all capital assets to accepted industry standards or above
4. Focus on watershed protection, including source water management and satisfactory wastewater influent

Measures

1. Meet all regulatory compliance requirements
2. Identify and minimize unaccounted for non-revenue water
3. Predictive and preventative asset maintenance executed utilizing new business systems technologies

Growth and Expansion

Pursue opportunities for feasible and desirable growth and expansion

WCSA will seek opportunities to partner with local governments and other political subdivisions to authenticate the development of our Capital Improvement Program to best serve Washington County. WCSA supports and promotes economic development in Washington County.

Strategies

1. Continue to have an affordable rate structure that allows for continued infrastructure improvements and growth while maintaining a healthy financial standing and adequate reserves for debt service contingencies
2. Develop and maintain relationships with partner jurisdictions and economic development entities to anticipate service needs for likely economic development locations
3. Work with local governments and community leaders to identify areas of need in the community for safe drinking water and public sewer service that promotes growth in the County

Measures

1. Develop comprehensive Capital Improvement Plans to provide infrastructure for water and sewer that is resilient and meets the needs of Washington County
2. Utilize tools, techniques, and financing options to improve the efficiency of capital expansion projects
3. Explore innovative opportunities to offset costs and increase revenue to allocate funding for growth and expansion

Financial Viability

Effectively manage WCSA's resources

Operating a utility is a resource-intensive endeavor, which depends on appropriate operating and capital funding. WCSA is committed to utilizing its financial resources in a strategic and efficient manner.

Strategies

1. Maintain tight budgetary controls over all operations
2. Provide the necessary tools and resources required to produce an excellent product and ensure superior service to our customers
3. Evaluate expenses and financial results to achieve desired goals
4. Utilize Continuous Process Improvements to reduce cost and maximize savings across all departments

Measures

1. Sustain industry standard financial metrics to ensure continuous success
2. Establish and maintain KPIs for all processes
3. Adhere to state mandated purchasing policies while leveraging statewide contracts whenever appropriate

Communications

Enhance and expand internal and external communication and engagement

The WCSA team recognizes the importance of communicating internally and externally and showing genuine interest in solving problems. Ensuring the utility's success requires strong, consistent communication through a variety of mediums.

Strategies

1. Develop external customer communications including online portals for usage and billing information
2. Update current WCSA website to enhance customer usability
3. Establish internal employee internet site to provide organizational information

Measures

1. Web based customer communications implemented with interactive customer provisions
2. WCSA website updated to better serve customers requirements
3. Interactive organizational information available to all employees

Technology

Identify, develop, and integrate technology in support of effective operations

Technological innovation is an integral part of assuring success as a resilient service provider. WCSA will fully use technology to better serve our internal and external customers and increase operational efficiencies.

Strategies

1. Evaluate and implement new business systems utilizing the latest technology to create greater efficiencies and effectiveness for all operations
2. Utilize state-of-the-art equipment, vehicles, and facilities to meet industry standards and best practices to reduce costs and increase work output
3. Continue to advance our cyber security to protect data integrity, confidentiality and availability of services to our customers

Measures

1. Create real-time performance measures for all operations with KPI visualization tools to ensure ongoing success
2. Workforce empowerment to utilize state-of-the-art equipment to reduce controllable expenses in all operations
3. Administer a security architecture plan that safeguards IT and SCADA systems and provides for a disaster recovery plan

Employee Engagement

Recruit, develop, and engage

A high performing workforce requires individuals who are skilled and dedicated. WCSA will attract, retain, motivate, manage, and reward exceptional employees who make significant contributions to its success.

Employee engagement includes employees showing up to work with a sense of purpose, a deep commitment to the organization, dedication to performing well, a collaborative attitude, good communication with co-workers and leaders, and the ability to give and receive feedback positively.

Employee engagement makes a difference because it affects performance, productivity, profits, and is key for business sustainability. It also has a significant impact on employee well-being, how well employees can serve customers, and is essential for recruiting and retaining top talent.

Strategies

1. Implement a program to support leadership and supervisory development
2. Recognize employee contributions and accomplishments on a monthly basis
3. Develop and implement an organizational succession plan

Measures

1. Employee engagement survey results
2. Voluntary employee turnover
3. Lost time incident rate



Drivers of Engagement

Leadership

Leaders affect employee engagement the most. A leader's ability to build authentic relationships with employees can have a significant impact on employee engagement.

Leadership coaching should be a part of this strategy to ensure there is a sound succession plan to fill roles that are vacated so there is no shortage of talent to step into these roles.

Culture

Organizational culture is important because it is the primary factor for determining how well an organization executes on every other aspect of its performance. Culture may also be the most important competitive advantage because it is so difficult to copy.

Development

Investment in development and learning opportunities helps fulfill employees' needs to grow and develop professionally. This can help them become better at their jobs or to take on new roles and responsibilities within the organization.

Because learning is essential for employees to develop new skills and find fulfillment in their work, by offering development opportunities to our employees we are laying the groundwork for long-term success with a team of engaged employees who do their jobs well.

Inclusion

A culture of inclusiveness promotes higher levels of employee engagement. Employees need to feel a sense of belonging and connection with co-workers, and they need to be comfortable in their work environment.

Inclusion helps engagement by fostering an environment where all employees can express concerns, ask questions, or make suggestions without fear, shame, or negative repercussions.

Recognition

Recognizing the accomplishments and contributions of employees reinforces the sense of purpose; rewarding them and showing them how their contributions have an impact in the organization is important.

Recognition is a great way to engage employees because it boosts self-esteem and personal competency. Motivation is a huge factor in employee engagement. When it comes to motivators, recognition is one of the best ways to improve employee engagement in the organization.

Trust

Employees need to have a trust-based relationship with leadership. Leaders should continually work to build and maintain trust by providing clarity and transparency about employees' roles and responsibilities.

Work/Life Balance

Giving employees autonomy over their roles and trusting them to do their jobs, engaging them frequently, and offering opportunities to have healthy communication.

Business Objectives



Safety for all employees



Continuous improvements to reduce costs and enhance operations



No regulatory violations in water and wastewater operations



Improved customer communications and community outreach



Continue to strengthen our cyber security



Financial strength and agility to serve Washington County

Communications and Implementation

Communications

WCSA is committed to improving internal and external communications. For internal organizational communications we continue to have all employee meetings to update everyone on our business and recognize individual contributions that contribute to overall organizational success. We are developing an employee internet site to provide information to all employees.

For external communications with our customers and community we will continue to enhance our quarterly newsletter with business updates focused on safe drinking water to promote public health and safety. WCSA has plans to provide an outage map for water interruptions and to automate communications with our customers. WCSA is committed to establishing effective communication channels to address customer needs, promote conservation efforts and foster a sense of trust within the community. WCSA is committed to improving internal and external communications. Effective communication is critical for the successful implementation of our strategic plan, and for WCSA's overall success.

Enhanced communications will be the initiative throughout the organization to ensure that all employees are working towards WCSA's ultimate vision and mission.

Implementation

The goals, measures, and strategies contain a series of initiatives and projects that, when implemented, will move WCSA toward achievement of its desired outcomes. However, it is important to note that for the desired results to be achieved, the strategies must be effectively implemented. Therefore, careful attention and focus on strategy implementation is essential to achieving strategic success.

Elements of the implementation process for WCSA include:

- Annually establishing Strategic Initiatives for the business
- Developing SMART Departmental Goals and Objective:

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Reasonable

Timely

- Establishing individual initiatives to support Departmental Goals and Objectives
- Ensuring all employees are setup for success by providing required resources:
 - Manpower
 - Capital investments
 - Equipment
 - Tools
 - Training
 - Education
 - Certifications
- **Updating the Board of Commissioners:** The Leadership Team will periodically update the Board on progress, achievements, and opportunities related to the strategic plan. The Board of Commissioners will monitor progress and provide feedback.



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