**Model B: Utility of the Future Today Organizational Culture Narrative**

**West County Wastewater District (WCWD)**

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| **Utility Description (combine all plants if a multi-site system)** | | | |
| Utility Name: **West County Wastewater District (WCWD)** | | | |
| Type (e.g., single plant, regional system, multiple plants, collection system only, stormwater, etc.):  **Single Water Resource Recovery Plant, with Collection System.** | | | |
| Service Area (square miles): **16** | | Average Annual Daily Flow (MGD): **9.5 MGD** | |
| Population Served: **93,000** | | | |
| **Location** | | | |
| Street Address: **2910 Hilltop Drive** | | | |
| City: State: **Richmond California** | | Country:  **USA** | |
| Zip Code/Country Code: **94806** | | | |
| **Contact Information** | | | |
| Name:  **Lisa Malek-Zadeh,**  **Business Services Manager** | Phone:  **(510) 662-3612** | | Email:  **LMalek-Zadeh@wcwd.org** |

# **ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE NARRATIVE:**

The West County Wastewater District (West County) is entering its 97th year of protecting public health and San Francisco Bay in the West Contra Costa County Region. West County recently completed our 14th consecutive year of perfect NPDES compliance at our Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) in Richmond, California. We are not aware of any U.S. wastewater utilities with 14 or more consecutive years of perfect environmental compliance that are as small as our agency (10 MGD). In addition to our strong record of environmental stewardship, we are also very strong financially, having minimal debt. West County is in the bottom quartile among San Francisco Bay Area wastewater utilities for our rates.

More than one-third of the electrical power needed to run our WRRF is provided by our 1 megawatt state-of-the-art solar energy system. This innovative, first-of-its kind facility was the recipient of awards from WEF’s California Member Association, CWEA, and also from the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA).

**West County’s Innovative Dual Axis Tracking Solar Energy Array Meets One-Third of Plant Electrical Demand**

Perhaps our greatest achievement as a WRRF is that more than 80% of our treated water is reused year-round through our regional partnership with the neighboring drinking water utility and nearby Chevron Oil Refinery, for cooling and boiler feedwater. We have been reusing more than half of our effluent for over 20 years, and ~80% for the past five years. Clearly, West County has long been a leader among northern California utilities in the core areas of environmental and financial stewardship.

Despite these achievements as a well-run WRRF committed to water reuse and renewable energy, we began to realize in 2014 that something was missing. We were a well-run utility, but with a traditional, conventional organizational culture that was holding us back from truly becoming a “Utility of the Future.” Up until 2015, we did not engage our community, our customers, or the media. We quietly did our jobs of cost-effective water reuse.

From 2012-2015, three consecutive years of unilaterally imposed extensions of the 2012 labor contract exposed the weakness of our traditional “top-down” culture. For nearly five years, organizational turmoil adversely impacted employee morale and productivity. Our organization cried out for new leadership.

In 2014, our ratepayers voted two new active members of the West County community onto our Board, followed by three more new Board members in 2016. In two years, from 2014-2016, West County had an entire new Board of five, all progressive leaders who brought a new enlightened vision of empowering our employees, creating a participative management culture, educating and engaging our community/customers, and transforming a well-run traditional utility into a true “Utility of the Future.” Our evolving new Board has provided a new strategic focus of a more sustainable “triple-bottom-line” approach to our Mission and Vision, adding the “social” component to our long-standing excellence in the areas of environmental and financial stewardship. In less than three years, we have emerged as a stronger organization, engaging employee in the strategic planning process, in development of core values, and on cross-functional teams that have strengthened key relationships across the organization and improved organizational performance.

Following are several examples of programs and initiatives that we have put in place to enhance our Organizational Culture:

1. Actively participated in a northern California collection system program that led to the creation of a joint publication entitled “Collection System of the Future” by SF Bay Area peer utilities.
2. Staff Reports to the Board identify which strategic goals the requested action supports.
3. Established a mentoring program (“Buddy Program”) for every new hire to the District. Every new employee connects with a member of someone from a different functional workgroup. They meet monthly, and the “Buddy” helps the new hire better understand our culture, and helps them address any communication challenges that they may be experiencing.
4. Celebrations of successes have become part of our culture. Examples include an annual All-Staff Recognition Luncheon and Board Resolutions that honor every retiring employee.
5. Annual Safety Day, bringing in outside experts to speak on various aspects of utility safety that benefit all of our employees (office and field.)
6. Established required “Prevention of Bullying” and “Prevention of Sexual Harassment” training for all employees.
7. Input by all employees encouraged into the development of our Strategic Plan – 1/3rd of employees chose to participate in this effort. We plan to engage 100% of employees in our next Strategic Plan update.

Recognizing the need for strong, knowledgeable and supportive staff leadership to transform our Organizational Culture fully embrace our evolution to a “Utility of the Future”, our Board appointed Past-WEF President Ed McCormick as Interim General Manager in early 2017. Ed was selected, in part, for his success at EBMUD in becoming the first net-positive renewable energy-producing wastewater utility in North America.

However, we approached Ed even more for his experience in transforming organizational culture, engaging communities and developing regional partnerships, and for his track record in working effectively with employee groups and labor unions. Hiring Ed underscores West County’s commitment to continuing to implement our vision of transforming our organization into a “Utility of the Future.”

Since appointing Ed, following are several examples of advances we have made in further transforming our Organizational Culture into that of a “Utility of the Future.”

A) Adding the following four key positions:

Leadership Development/Organizational Performance Manager *(to fully establish West County as a learning organization focused on developing and fully engaging every employee, and in establishing key performance indicators and an organizational performance measurement with a high level dashboard for the Board and more detailed dashboards for Staff.)*

1. Community Engagement Leader *(to educate and engage our community/ratepayers, build key partnerships and relationships with a broad variety of organizations, upgrade our website, communications/publications and media outreach.)*
2. Wastewater Process Engineer *(to further advance all aspects of water resource recovery, optimize operations in the areas of energy and chemical usage, biosolids reuse and odor control; champion initiatives to achieve 100% water reuse and become a net producer of electrical power.)*
3. Instrument Technician-in-Training *(with a new plant upgrade coming online in fall 2017, the number of instruments in the plant is tripling, requiring an additional instrument technician. Hiring a Technician-in-Training demonstrates West County’s continued commitment to “growing our own”, with a strong focus on employee development.)*

New Position #1: One of our four, new core values is “People.” For the first time, we now have a position dedicated to creating and developing a progressive organizational culture to support our people, with a focus on leadership and employee development soft skills training in the areas of teambuilding, coaching (rather than “supervising”), conflict resolution, communication and interpersonal skills. This person will also facilitate the development of our Strategic Plan Updates, and coordinate a performance management system to align every employee (performance plan) with our strategic goals in order to help us achieve our Vision.

New Position #2: We have also created, for the first time in our history, a Community Affair position who reports to the General Manager and will work closely with the Board and the Executive Leadership Team to educate and engage our community and the media.

B) Developing Board and Board Committee Reports that focus the Board on key strategic direction decisions, rather than on tactical/operational decisions. This approach has been successful in implementing initiatives that directly support the Board’s vision of an empowered workforce and an engaged and educated community. A side-benefit of this more appropriate role of the Board and Staff has been a 50% reduction in Board Meetings and Committee Meetings, both of which in the past had encouraged unnecessary Board engagement in operational decisions.

C) Holding “All-Staff Roundtable” Meetings every six weeks to develop cross-Departmental teams, ensure that every employee is listened to and good ideas are implemented, find ways to eliminate unnecessary administrative burden and delegate decision-making authority to the lowest appropriate level in the organization.

D) Significantly Enhanced Leadership Participation in Professional Associations and Regional Partnerships. We are “stepping up our game” through increased leadership engagement with regional organizations such as Bay Area Clean Water Agencies (BACWA), and the Bay Area Biosolids to Energy Coalition. In addition, we have entered a partnership with the San Francisco Estuary Partnership, a Watershed-based group focused on regional planning of multi-benefit green projects to address sea level rise and other aspects of Climate Change.

E) Funded a New “Innovative Employee Ideas for Revenue Enhancement” Program Fund at $50,000 in FY18 and $100,000 in FY19. This fund will help identify and develop employee ideas for generation of revenue to reduce upward pressure on rates. This fund is also intended to help accelerate our utility toward all aspects of Water Resource Recovery, including energy and nutrient recovery.

In closing, this section on Organizational Culture, we believe that over the past three years, we have made significant strides in transforming our Water Resource Recovery Utility into a true “Utility of the Future.” We are committed to a path toward progressive, participative management, employee development and empowerment, and an educated and engaged community.