

LEHIGH ACRES MUNICIPAL  
SERVICES IMPROVEMENT  
DISTRICT

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

OCTOBER 1, 2026-SEPTEMBER 30, 2031

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
June 15, 2026



# LEHIGH ACRES MUNICIPAL SERVICES IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

## Table of Contents

- 3. Introduction from the Chair of the Board
- 4. Executive Summary
- 6. Contributors
- 7. Mission, Vision Statements
- 8. Values Statement
- 9. Organizational Chart
- 10. Organization Profile and History
- 15. SWOT Analysis, Critical Issues and Strategies
- 20. Weaknesses
- 25. Opportunities
- 26. Threats
- 28. Program Objectives, Strategies, and Goals

# Introduction from the Chair of the Board

Introduction from the Chair of the Board

June 2026

Dear Fellow Residents and Assessment Payers:

For more than 60 years, the Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District has proudly served our community by protecting and managing its water resources through effective stormwater management, water quality improvements, and flood protection. As Florida's largest unincorporated community, Lehigh Acres depends on forward-thinking special districts like ours to deliver essential services that enhance quality of life for all residents.



*Michael Bonacolta, Chair*

Over the decades, the District has evolved to meet the changing needs of our growing community. While stormwater management remains our core mission, we have expanded our role to include parks, community signage, and other services that enrich the places where we live, work, and play. Following our name and classification change in 2015, new opportunities emerged to broaden our capabilities through collaboration with Lee County and voter support. This has positioned us to potentially deliver additional services—such as sidewalks, streetlights, and water and sewer infrastructure—in the years ahead.

Since first running for the Board in 2010, my goal has remained simple: to make a meaningful, positive difference in the community I've called home my entire life. It has been a profound honor to serve you. I've dedicated myself to mastering the complexities of District operations so I can make informed, responsible decisions that deliver lasting benefits to our residents. Together with my fellow Commissioners and our dedicated staff, we have worked diligently to strengthen the District and advance projects that improve daily life in Lehigh Acres.

Our community has faced significant challenges during my tenure—including Hurricanes Irma, Ian, Helene, and Milton, a global pandemic, and economic uncertainty. Through every trial, the District has remained steadfast, delivering uninterrupted essential services while finding innovative ways to build resiliency and prepare for the future.

Thanks to strong collaboration among our Board, staff, legislative advocates, and local elected officials, we have successfully secured vital grants and legislative funding for critical projects. A prime example is the Rehydration of Resilient Infrastructure for Stormwater & Environment (RISE) Project, which received \$3,554,300 in state funding. This investment will modernize our aging stormwater system, enhance water storage capacity, and improve water quality—all while reducing the financial burden on our assessment payers.

As we look forward, I am optimistic about the road ahead. The attached Strategic Plan lays out a clear vision and roadmap for continued investment in infrastructure, environmental stewardship, and community enhancements that will keep Lehigh Acres a vibrant and desirable place to live for generations to come.

Thank you for your continued trust and support. Together, we will build a stronger, more resilient Lehigh Acres.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'MB', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Michael Bonacolta, Chair, LAMSID Board of Commissioners

## Executive Summary

The Board of Commissioners and staff of the Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District (The Municipal District) are proud to present this 5-year “Strategic Plan” for October 1, 2026 through September 30, 2031.

Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District (LA-MSID), a Florida Statutes Chapter 189 Special District was created on June 10, 2015. The former East County Water Control District was created in 1958 to drain the Lehigh Acres area for development. ECWCD had since moved to a more balanced “water control” strategy in the 1980’s, as the demand for more flood control and aquifer recharge increased over the years. Since then, the District has made incredible progress building the infrastructure needed to balance drainage, water storage, water quality and aquifer recharge.

In the early 2000s, ECWCD realized that it did not have the science available to make major stormwater infrastructure improvement decisions that could have an adverse financial impact on the whole community, while the projects might have been somewhat ineffective. During this time, ECWCD became involved in the South Florida Water Management District’s (SFWMD) Caloosahatchee River Partners in Restoration and Lehigh Headwaters Initiative. Subsequently, a joint review and the creation of a Mike She, Mike 11 computer model of the district’s drainage system was conducted for ECWCD and SFWMD by ADA Engineering, which identified inadequacies within the ECWCD water control system that would be exacerbated by continued development towards a full build-out population of more than 300,000 residents. Several potential future projects were identified to help mitigate the current system’s shortfalls and start planning for the future. Today, the SW Florida economy is very strong and the water control system needs that were identified for future build out must still continue to be addressed as development warrants

The “ADA Engineering Report” from 2007 indicated a potential failure of the Harns Marsh perimeter berm during a 100-year storm. Many of the projects listed in the 2025-2030 Capital Improvement Plan are directly related to the recommendations from the ADA study. The report indicated that a shortage of stormwater storage exists and must be addressed soon (see storage progress, rain gauge, figure 1).

In September of 2017, The Municipal District took a direct hit from Hurricane Irma with Category 2 force winds and very heavy rainfall. There was widespread damage inside of our borders and the surrounding SW Florida communities. There was scattered high stormwater levels that crested some canal banks and caused a considerable amount of road flooding. Several homes downstream of the District, built in identified flood plains with finished floor elevations below the minimum FEMA 100-year storm elevations reported interior flooding. This event emphasized the need for more stormwater projects all over Lee County, including in and around the Municipal District. This event should create some state and local funding opportunities in the future. Subsequently, southwest Florida has taken many “near hits” from Hurricanes Ian (2022), Helene (2024) and Milton (2024). While these storms had major impacts to southwest Florida, Lehigh Acres fared much better with some wind damage to homes and wash outs within our stormwater system.

The District’s population has continued to grow at a high rate for the last several years. Much natural storage has been systematically eliminated. Through local partnerships, grants and legislative appropriations the District has completed many projects and have begun a new Mike She, Mike 11 modelling update to determine our shortfall in storage and where localized projects can help our system remain effective.

The first five-year strategic plan was presented in fiscal year 2007/2008 and has been updated annually since then.

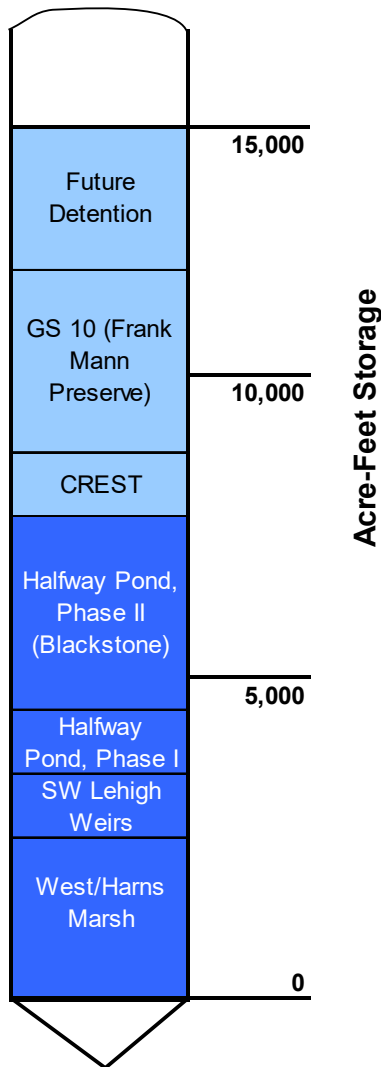
The goals, objectives and strategies outlined at the end of this report have reinforced our commitment to:

- ✓ provide the best level of general maintenance of our conveyance system
- ✓ continue to develop a high-quality, motivated and well-trained work force
- ✓ renew or replace substandard infrastructure
- ✓ plan and progress toward build-out goals
- ✓ secure low-cost financing and/or grant funding for our projects
- ✓ provide a consistent high level of services in a cost-effective and efficient manner

The Board of Commissioners have adopted revised prior Strategic Plans on these dates:

September 8, 2009	August 18, 2014	June 22, 2020
January 22, 2010	July 20, 2015	July 19, 2021
June 21, 2010	June 20, 2016	June 28, 2022
July 18, 2011	June 19, 2017	June 27, 2023
June 18, 2012	June 18, 2018	June 24, 2024
June 17, 2013	August 19, 2019	July 21, 2025

**Approximate 100-Year Storage Needed for Full Build-out**



Component	Unit Ac-ft	Cumulative Ac-ft
Future Detention	4,672	15,000
GS 10 (Frank Mann Preserve)	3,000	10,328
CREST	700	7,328
Halfway Pond Phase 2 (Blackstone)	2,000	6,628
Halfway Pond Phase 1	1,000	4,628
SW Lehigh Weirs	1,000	3,628
West/Harns Marsh	2,628	2,628

Note that the West Marsh volume shown is for the total Harns Marsh System

Figure 1

## Contributors

### **Board of Commissioners:**

Mike Bonacolta, Chair, Seat 4  
Julie Hollingsworth, Vice Chair, Seat 1  
Rebecca Thompson, Treasurer, Seat 3  
David Deetscreek, Secretary, Seat 2  
Katy Hoover, Commissioner, Seat 5

### **Staff:**

David E. Lindsay, District Manager  
Michael S. Cook, Assistant District Manager  
Lisa Waskiewicz, Resource and Relations Director  
Alexis Nielson, Administrative Support Specialist  
Dana March, Finance Director  
William Walker, Field Operations Director

### **Consultants:**

Daniel Schroeder, District Engineer, Aim Engineering & Surveying, Inc.  
Seth Behn, General Counsel, Lewis, Longman & Walker, P.A.  
Nik Joshi, Labor Counsel, Hultman & Joshi, P.A.

## **Mission, Vision & Values Statements**

### **Mission Statement**

*Adopted 7/20/2015*

Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District is dedicated to preserving and managing natural and community resources by providing: safe, reliable, and high-quality services to its constituents in an environmentally and financially responsible manner.

### **Vision Statement**

*Adopted 8/11/2015*

Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District, through the efforts of dedicated elected officials and employees, will deliver the highest quality services, provide a fair and orderly system of governance, and protect the area's environmental and community resources.

# Values Statement

January 11, 2007

## Diversity of our workforce

We want to maintain the diversity of our workforce to be consistent with the diversity of our community.

## Integrity

We take pride in our work and are accountable and trusted to carry out our responsibilities with honesty and integrity. *We believe highly skilled and ethical managers are the foundation of a solid team.*

## Service

Our ultimate responsibility to our assessment payers is our commitment to maintain District Property and Natural Resources at the highest possible level.

## Teamwork

We believe that the basis for an effective team is built with well-qualified, well-trained individuals that take the initiative to seek personal development. *Employees must feel free to show initiative, take leadership and make suggestions to solve problems.*

## Respect

We are committed to building an honest, fair and ethically sound relationship with both public and private organizations. *All individuals are unique and important, and will be treated with fairness, dignity and respect.*

## Innovation

We are committed to using innovation, technology and best management practices to provide excellent service to all our residents.

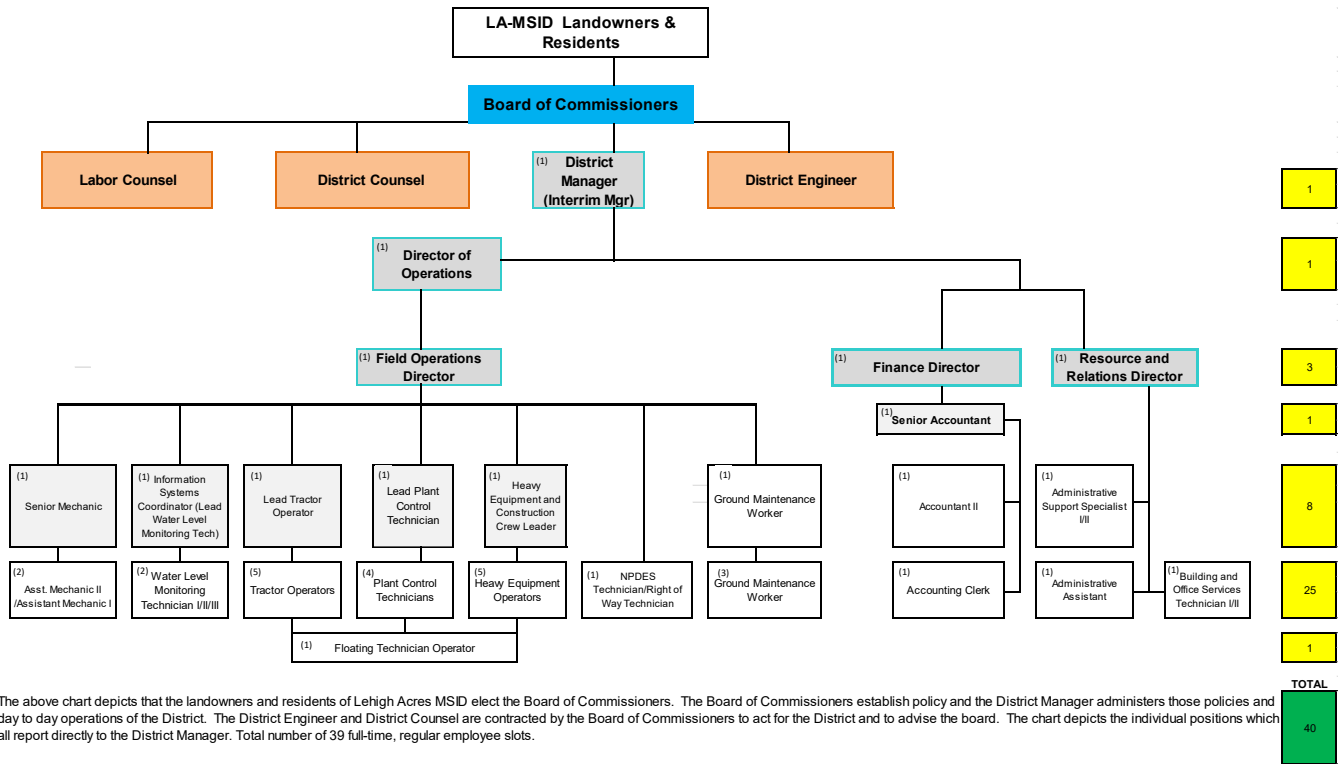
## Community Involvement

We strongly believe in community involvement and actively participate in various local civic organizations.

## Trust

We promote open communication, cooperation and teamwork which are shared responsibilities that are essential to the successful performance of our employees.

**Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District  
Organizational Structure**  
Approved: 11/18/24    Effective: 11/18/24



## **Organization Profile and History**

### **The Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District**

Prior to the 1940s, eastern Lee County and Western Hendry County were a sparsely populated, undeveloped and agricultural area comprised of virtually flat land dotted with pristine pine flat-woods and pocked with numerous wetland areas. This type of eco-system allowed the 110 square mile area (now known as Lehigh Acres) to provide a significant amount of sheet-flow, percolation and groundwater recharge. At times, severe rain-storms and subsequent sheet-flow would overwhelm the rivers and creeks to the north of Lehigh Acres that discharged into the Caloosahatchee River at approximately 4' above sea level (NGVD). Today's State Road 82 was a natural ridge at approximately 31' above sea level (NGVD) and was used as an old cattle route, for bringing herds of cattle from Immokalee and Picayune Strand to Punta Rassa, for shipment to market. During the period leading to the 1960s, water was seen as the common enemy of the State of Florida and the primary objective was to drain it and prepare the land for development.

Inspired by the ingenuity of Lee Ratner, one of Lehigh Acres' original developers, and the concerns of the state, Judge Archie M. Odom handed down an order on May 5, 1958 creating East County Water Control District (ECWCD) – a political sub-division of the State of Florida. At that time, the State of Florida allowed developers to create drainage districts that would operate under Chapter 298

of the Florida Statutes. Chapter 298 allowed ECWCD to sell bonds, develop drainage infrastructure, operate and maintain the infrastructure and assess non-ad valorem taxes to pay for the work, among other powers. Enabling legislation was added that provided for five Supervisors to govern the new district.

As Lee Ratner and “Lee Land and Title” (Lehigh Corporation) developed roads and the other necessary infrastructure to prepare Lehigh Acres for development, East County Water Control District was engaged to implement the creation and maintenance of a drainage system. The area now known as Frank Mann Preserve or Section 10, which is on North Joel Blvd., was used to mine road base rock material to build many of Lehigh’s copious roads. During that era, the method of electing the Board of Supervisors for ECWCD was by one-acre, one vote. Lehigh Corporation owned the vast majority of the land and, therefore, controlled ECWCD. The Board for Lehigh Corporation was also the Board for ECWCD. As the land was platted for development, the canals, lakes, and other infrastructure were dedicated to ECWCD (other canals and lakes that were owned by Lehigh Corporation were also deeded to ECWCD).

It was not until the mid-1970s that the State of Florida discovered damage due to the “over-draining” from Lehigh Acres and the overall negative effect that this was having on Florida’s water resources. In 1975, steps were taken to correct the situation when the State and Federal agencies performed a rapid investigation on the practice of wetland drainage. Their final report determined that there was extreme “over-draining” of stormwater from ECWCD lands. Governing agencies forced the ECWCD to install many “temporary” water control structures in their canal system to better manage the stormwater and promote ground water recharge. Most of these temporary structures were in operation until well into the 2000s.

In 1979, ECWCD evolved from a drainage district to a water control district in order to preserve and protect water reserves using a combination of drainage, storage, and best water management practices. By 1988, as a majority of land was sold to residents, Lehigh Corporation began to lose control of the

Board's decision-making power. Legislation was approved to change the election of ECWCD Board Members from one-acre/one vote to a general election, popular vote. Lehigh Corporation completely lost control of ECWCD by the early 1990s.

ECWCD plays a crucial role in the community by preserving and protecting water resources in an area burdened with both intense drought and excessive rainy seasons. Lehigh Acres averages 52 inches of rain per year, with actual totals ranging between 36 and 80 inches per year. The rainfall is seasonal with three to four months during the summer contributing the majority of rain, with tropical systems also significantly contributing to the annual total (Scholl).

All of ECWCD's stormwater discharges through one of the four (4) existing outfalls to the Caloosahatchee River, from west to east they are: 1) Orange River 2) Hickey's Creek 3) Bedman Creek 4) Carlos Waterway. The Caloosahatchee River transitions into the Gulf of Mexico in areas known as estuaries. These estuaries are sensitive to a seasonal over-abundance of salinity or fresh water.

Lehigh Acres developed rather slowly for many years, having only 33,000 residents as of the 2000 census. During that period, many landowners stopped paying their assessments, as they felt that the land was valueless. The area experienced a construction and real estate boom beginning in 2005 that preceded the boom nationwide. Real estate prices increased tremendously and as the population swelled ECWCD, along with all governments began revising their Capital Improvement Plans to reflect the rapid growth. Practically all delinquent ECWCD assessments were paid as the underlying land gained value and ECWCD revenues exceeded budget projections. ECWCD was also able to sell spoil (dirt) to support the construction boom. These factors and others helped ECWCD keep assessment rates low.

During the real estate boom, a modeling study of the stormwater system was commissioned and performed by ADA Engineering, to analyze population growth and future flooding potential. This report was completed in 2007 and indicated that ECWCD will be approximately 15,000 acre-feet short of needed storage when Lehigh Acres is completely built-out. Following the completion of this study, the ECWCD Board immediately began to look for solutions to the District's stormwater storage problem. ECWCD

had been striving for affordability and effectiveness as it pursued innovative solutions to issues that were identified in the modeling report. Beginning in 2007, the housing boon waned and signs of a recession began to become apparent and by the summer of 2008, the nation was in a full-blown recession.

In May of 2008, the Lee County 20/20 Program agreed to purchase 200 acres adjacent to Harns Marsh (now known as the West Marsh). Lee County had allowed ECWCD to create a stormwater system on this parcel to provide better water quality in the Orange River and provide additional storage for high-flow rain events. The District signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners on 12/11/2008, which divided maintenance responsibilities in the West Marsh and preliminary design of this project was completed in 2010. The census of 2010 marked the population at 86,000. Construction of the “West Marsh, Phase I” began simultaneously and provided fill for the State Road 82 Widening Segment I in the Summer of 2017. West Marsh Phase II excavation provided fill for Segment II of the State Road 82 Widening and was completed in December 2020. Phase III, including construction of the operating water control structures and the planting of thousands of native trees and plants, was completed in March 2021. The widening of Hendry Extension Canal began in January 2019 and provided fill for the Segment III and IV of the State Road 82 widening.

In April 2012, funds became available from the South Florida Water Management District to design and construct a pump station at Halfway Pond, also known as “Moving Water South, Phase I”. This project was identified in the 2007 ADA report as part of the storage solution. The construction for this project was completed in October 2012 and has contributed at least 1,000 acre-feet annually towards reducing the District’s storage deficit, along with providing freshwater relief to the estuaries in the Caloosahatchee River Basin and groundwater recharge in Lehigh Acres.

By 2014, the recession had run its course. Existing abandoned homes were being bought, new homes were being built again, home prices were on the rise and the State of Florida was realizing a substantial revenue increase. The Board and staff were as determined as ever to accomplish their mission, while being sensitive to the current economic pressures that were still facing our residents and the world

around us. The projected population of Lehigh Acres as of January 2015 was 115,000 (BEBR Dept. of the University of Florida).

On June 10, 2015, Governor Rick Scott signed Chapter 2015-202, championed by local State Representative Matt Caldwell into law. With this action, ECWCD was dissolved and the Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District (Lehigh Acres MSID) was created. All acts, property, obligations, and liabilities of the former ECWCD were transferred to the newly created Lehigh Acres MSID.

What this change in law and the creation of the Chapter 189 special district helps achieve, is a more clearly defined scope of our services – which remain what they have always been: drainage and flood control; conservation and mitigation; irrigation; navigation; roads/bridges; and limited parks powers. The new law was significant as it provided the potential to oversee the following additional services: streetlights, sidewalks, community signage, local planning, and potable water and sanitary sewer for the Lehigh Acres community.

As part of this change, legislators provided language that would allow Lehigh Acres MSID to study these new powers. However, these are not automatic powers. If the results of the study are favorable, the Lehigh Acres MSID must first enter into an agreement with Lee County and present our community with a referendum vote in a regular general election.

Great consideration was given to the powers added into Lehigh Acres MSID's legislation; consequentially, with the passage of this bill it is clear legislators felt these powers could be appropriately governed by the expertise of our board and staff. On November 6, 2018, the District brought its first referendum before the people of Lehigh Acre for a vote. An overwhelming 70.12% of the voters cast their ballot in favor of the referendum and community signage became the first added power since Lehigh Acres MSID was created in 2015. The District unveiled the first of five planned welcome signs on January 13, 2021.

The five-member, publicly elected Board of Commissioners of ECWCD will continue to serve as the Lehigh Acres MSID Board of Commissioners and their terms of office will remain the same. ECWCD was previously funded through non-ad valorem assessments – an annual flat-rate tax that is based on the size of a parcel, not its value. This continues to be the same manner in which Lehigh Acres MSID is funded.

LA-MSID completed the third and final phase of the West Marsh project in 2021. Aided by many grant sources and FDOT fees, the \$13,200,000 project was completed in March 2021 with less than 5% of the total being covered by District assessments. The District then turned its attention to a similar project, the CREST project in Hendry County. In 2017, following Hurricane Irma, the District received financial assistance from the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to move and rebuild Structure Hendry 2, as a first phase of CREST. LA-MSID has been awarded a \$2 million water quality grant from FDEP in 2021 to start construction on CREST, Phase II. In 2022, the legislature awarded \$4-million to LA-MSID to build CREST, Phase III. In 2023, the Legislature awarded through appropriations \$1,500,000 for the purchase of the Leeland Sinkhole and \$250,000 for the purchase of a parcel necessary for the ROBUST project in northeast Lehigh.

LA-MSID did not stop there. In 2024, LA-MSID was awarded \$15.5-million Governor's Grant to continue design and to build Frank Mann Preserve. Also, the legislature awarded LA-MSID \$1.5-million for ROBUST-Phase II and \$2-million for the purchase of a building adjacent to the sinkhole and site improvements. Unfortunately, the sinkhole grant was vetoed by Governor DeSantis. In early 2025, LA-MSID was awarded \$1.705-million to complete ROBUST-Phase III.

During the 2025 Legislative Session, LA-MSID was extremely successful in securing funding with a \$2.2-million appropriation for the addition of an interpretive center and land improvements at the Leeland Bottomless Lake (sinkhole). Additionally, a \$1.6-million appropriation was added to earlier appropriations for a grand-total of \$4.805-million to complete the Robust project. All projects are in various stages, moving toward completion.

LA-MSID has again partnered with Lee County based on the County's need for land to complete the Alico Road to Sunshine Boulevard Connector and Widening Project. The final agreement is close to finished. As a trade-off for LA-MSID's land and loss of storage, Lee County will be providing funding for a new full model of the District's drainage system, three new structures, a rebuild of Structure Sailfish 1 and a stormwater flood retention project at the County's Buckingham Trails location. The modeling is underway since January of 2026.

A decorative graphic consisting of two overlapping blue shapes that create a gradient effect, sloping upwards from left to right. The top shape is a darker blue, and the bottom shape is a lighter blue.

## Understanding This Strategic Plan

This strategic plan utilizes a traditional **SWOT**-style analysis. The acronym *SWOT* stands for **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**.

***Strengths*** are internal and are assets, resources or conditions of our District that the Commissioners or staff can control and give us an advantage over others; they can be budgetary, controls, activities or policy driven, etc.

***Weaknesses*** are internal and are assets, resources or conditions that the Commissioners or staff can control and improve upon; they can be budgetary, controls, activities or policy driven, etc.

***Opportunities*** are external and are factors or conditions that the Commissioners or staff can achieve and provides an advantage such as: things that are controlled by other agencies, private entities or the public, that is or can be a benefit for LA-MSID. They can be county or state policy, commodity pricing, the economy or public attitudes, etc.

***Threats*** are external and are factors or conditions that the Commissioners or staff have little control of; or things that are controlled by other agencies, private entities or the public, that is or can be a detriment to LA-MSID. They can be county or state policy, commodity pricing, the economy or public attitudes, etc.

***Program Objectives, Strategies and Goals (OSG)*** make up the final section. Each of these OSGs are directly derived from the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats listed herein. These OSGs will guide the District in its quest to become stronger over the next five years.

## SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Leadership, Staff and Performance                      Technology                      Facilities                      Financial Position                      Operations</p>	<p>Facilities Management and Growth Plan                      Perceived Identity/Messaging                      Technology                      Succession Planning                      Financial Limits</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Bank, State and Agency Funding                      Political and Resident Support                      Cooperative Efforts with Entities                      Increases in Technology                      Additional Powers                      The Economy</p>	<p>Labor Relation Issues                      Regulations/Unfunded Mandates                      Financial Changes                      Changes to District Makeup                      Environmental Concerns: Natural or                      Man-Made</p>

## Critical Issues and Strategies

### SWOT ANALYSIS

#### **STRENGTHS (Internal)**

##### **1. LEADERSHIP, STAFF AND PERFORMANCE**

- A. Open-minded Board of Commissioners** – The Board realizes that they must always look to the future population growth and to employ long-range planning efforts. They have commissioned several studies that will provide the science and facts needed to make the most prudent decisions, even though the decisions made may not be popular to all. The Commissioners act on issues based on the state of the economy and the understanding of how assessment increases affect the residents of the District.

*LA-MSID strives to increase the community education effort, so that the public can continue to support the work of the Board. The District will listen to the pulse of the community to determine the direction LA-MSID should take, whether it is to increase infrastructure, maintenance or to enact the powers afforded to them from the Florida Legislature. The Board members take an active role in formulating community partnerships. Objectives and Strategies: A2c, A2e, A3a, A3b.*

**B. Training and Safety of Staff**

LA-MSID staff members are highly-trained in their field. The list below highlights some of LA-MSID's in-house skills. Our employees bring with them a variety of additional skills that have been a great help in special projects:

- Seven operators with skills on many types of heavy equipment: track excavator, long stick excavator, loader, bulldozer, skid steer, rubber-tire back hoe, forklift, water tanker, offset hallow disc, hydro-seeder, brush chipper, vibratory plate compactor, dump truck, off-road dump truck, low boy semi and trailer.
- Six CDL Class "A" Licensed Drivers able to transport all LA-MSID equipment
- Seven skilled slope and flat mower operators
- Seven licensed pesticide applicators
- Three experienced telemetry technicians
- Three welders and fabricators
- Three mechanics with back-up

- Highly skilled and educated administrative and other staff with members holding eight bachelor's degrees in: Accounting, Business Management, Engineering Technology in Construction Engineering Technology, Management and Supervision, Political Science, Marketing & Management, etc. and master's degrees in Public Administration and Business.
- Four with varying levels of accounting experience
- Three management staff are Certified District Managers
- Two administrative staff with Certified District Admin Professional credentials
- Very knowledgeable and active public relations personnel
- LA-MSID has recently opted to piggy-back off of Lee County's lawn maintenance contract to limit the number of weed-eating crew, as our responsibilities continue to grow,

*Although the private market and wages paid are somewhat higher than our wages, LA-MSID strives and succeeds in hiring quality employees and "training our own operators" by providing the proper level of training, while also striving to maintain a motivated workforce with positive attitudes. We will continue to consider maintenance contracts in areas that our responsibilities experience growth. Objectives and Strategies: A1b, F2c*

## 2. TECHNOLOGY

The Commissioners and staff believe in the "do more with less" philosophy. LA-MSID is an organization that prides itself in regularly using technology to be more efficient and/or save money as indicated in the following areas:

- The District's new website was launched in December 2025. It is more user-friendly and ADA-compliant than the previous one.
- Software: Accufund Accounting Suite, on-line banking with positive pay which eliminates check writing fraud, Excel, Access, Archive Social, Municode/Civic Plus, OpenGov, telemetry, GIS, GPS Tracking, Time and Attendance Management, Microsoft Project, newly developed LA-MSID-specific databases and Outlook.
- Herbicide chemicals: selection, testing, staff-built invert spray rig, and many staff innovations.
- Heavy equipment: modernized upon replacement, increased fuel efficiency, track excavators, bulldozers, loaders, skid steers with many attachments, AQUA-BARRIERS, rubber tire backhoe, on road dump trucks, off-road dump truck converted military vehicle to water truck and converted military vehicle to swamp buggy/tour tram.
- GIS: budgeting, mail outs, mapping, tax roll certification, reporting, permits, and facility inventory.
- Databases: complaints, maintenance records, fuel use, parcels, permits, agenda item sheets, and publicly available database use.
- Telemetry: water control structures, weather stations, and video
- Communication: website, community outreach events/education, news releases, weather station, and satellite redundancy for internet and phone.

- Information Technology – wireless laptops and GPS tracking systems on vehicles and equipment
- Procurement Card Program: Makes transactions simpler, accounts payable processing more efficient; reduces bank fees, reduces check stock and postage expense and can provide a return of funds based on spending. The program also allows the District to monitor credit card usage and easily change individual credit levels on an as needed basis.
- Paperless processes and reporting: Board meetings, financial reporting, scanning archives and web site.
- Mobile Management and rights-of-way inspections: The Field Operations Director is much more efficient and can access the Lee County Property Appraiser website etc., to allow them to “Manage on the Move”.
- Time-clock using new technology: provides the District with a method of tracking employee time and attendance with finger print id’s, complimented by auto entry into our accounting software, and eliminates exhausting and error-filled paper methods while enhancing security along with saving staff’s precious time.
- Construction: Staff has completed five culvert replacement projects, with one more planned, using a slip-lining method that will save time and money. Staff is utilizing “aqua-barrier” technology to quickly and efficiently coffer-dam our projects. We have been utilizing the Florida Department of Forestry’s surplus equipment to bring free, used parts and vehicles back to the District.
- ROV: The District has recently purchased a Remote Operated Underwater Vehicle to inspect culverts on a rotating basis and after a new utility crossing and also to inspect the Leeland Bottomless Lake.

*LA-MSID strives to stay on the cutting edge of technology, specifically when LA-MSID can save valuable time and money or provide a superior service. Staff needs to stay current with changing technology and only recommend purchases to the Board that make fiscal and practical sense, under all economic conditions. Highly-trained staff, at proper operating levels, must be retained to ensure the efficiency of data entry and the overall accuracy and location of our data. Staff needs to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the technology as replacement of equipment becomes necessary. Objectives and Strategies: A2i, F3b.*

### 3. FACILITIES

- A. Central Location and Modern Facilities** – LA-MSID’s campus sits on an 8.7 +/- acre parcel that is very centrally located. The District’s campus is comprised of three modern buildings which are home to all of the District’s administrative and field staff. They include an administration building that, in addition to office space, houses a multi-purpose room that is used for public board meetings and a polling place; a fleet maintenance facility which includes a fuel station and wash-bay; and a renovated chemical storage facility, providing staff with a very efficient work site. The District’s facility upgrades have allowed staff to complete projects as quickly as possible, and in turn helps to keep assessments low. A future additional equipment storage area is planned. Another office space in the administration building was completed. A total of seven shipping containers are in service.

*The campus is fully serving our current needs. There is also undeveloped land for two additional buildings on our site for future growth, if needed. The site work that is in place provides for all stormwater, sanitary sewer, potable water and space for parking needs of any additional buildings. The Board and staff should continue planning over the next several years to anticipate any necessary growth, such as an intergovernmental emergency and operations center or needs based on adding a new power. Objectives and Strategies: A1d.*

- B. Great Backbone Drainage System** – Construction of LA-MSID’s drainage system began in the 1950s when water was considered the “common enemy” of the State of Florida. The State determined that following the construction and operation of the canal system, LA-MSID’s system over-drained the land, forcing LA-MSID to build a weir system. In the 1990s LA-MSID changed its philosophy to water control, rather than stormwater drainage only. Our goal is for all LA-MSID weirs to operate at a lower elevation to provide flood protection in the wet season. In the dry season, our goal is for all weirs to operate at a higher elevation in an attempt to hold more water in our system and to recharge the surficial and sandstone aquifers, as well as provide adequate aquaculture for native flora and fauna. Several of our current (GS 10, ROBUST and the C.R.E.S.T. (Dog-Hendry Connection) Phase III projects will benefit all of these goals.

*LA-MSID’s system will continue to be maintained and improved when practicable, to provide the maximum storage, flood control, aquifer recharge, aqua culture and water quality for the assessment payers and the environment. District staff operates under a maintenance plan (updated every year) and a facility operations manual. The District is always looking for opportunities to expand its capabilities. Objectives and Strategies: A2b, F1a, F2a, F2b.*

#### **4. FINANCIAL POSITION**

- A** LA-MSID has enjoyed an unmodified audit for many years and has received “no management comments” for the last nine out of 10 years. T.Y. Lin completed a bridge study and LA-MSID started the bridge fund in 2018 to start building reserves for repairs and eventual bridge replacements.

*The District’s mission is to preserve and protect water resources. As the needs of the community, environment and staff change, the Board must acknowledge those needs by evaluating crucial projects and assessment rates. LA-MSID will strive to keep assessment rates affordable for the foreseeable future. A2d.*

- B. Ability to Raise Revenue** – LA-MSID is a multi-county, Chapter 189 Special District, and as such has the power to levy non-ad valorem assessments. The Board weighs necessary improvements to our system to the assessment rate needed to achieve these actions. The Board of Commissioners are always very conservative when determining the assessment rate for the property owners. 2025 was the last time that the assessment rate was increased. Rates have remained the same since. Due to LA-MSID’s independent special district status, there is very little budgetary oversight from local government agencies. Should LA-MSID have a crisis, we have the ability to identify the needs as well as the means by which revenue can be raised.

*Most Lehigh Acres residents own a ¼ acre parcel, so the yearly assessment is only \$43.12! LA-MSID’s legislative language should remain intact so as not to disturb the ability to levy non-ad-valorem assessment. The district has an intermediate-term goal of operating without any debt service by 2030. This goal is made possible by opportunities for partnership with other agencies and private sources. The State of Florida has been flush with revenue due to the increase of tourism*

*and the receipt of federal funding due to recent hurricane damage in southwest Florida. Tourism has increased taxes significantly, creating a better opportunity for landing grants. Over the last 20-years, the District has secured more than \$70 million in grants!* **Objectives and Strategies: A2a.**

- C. Steady Revenue Stream** – Whereas other agencies (that depend on ad-valorem taxes as their main source of revenue) may experience a ballooning of their revenue during economic upswings and a collapse of revenue during a downturn, LA-MSID’s revenues will be steady. By relying on non-ad valorem assessments (based on lot size) as our main revenue source, LA-MSID has remained at a reasonable and healthy revenue level. Also, the legislature has not limited LA-MSID’s ability to raise revenues, if necessary, in an emergency, or to maintain its infrastructure, operations and future projects.

*LA-MSID will continue to be active with the Florida Association of Special Districts (FASD) and be willing to participate and/or support actions by the FASD that will protect LA-MSID, its objectives and goals. We must work with our local delegation members to educate them about LA-MSID’s public benefit and increase their awareness of the steps we take to keep our assessments affordable while providing necessary services.* **Objectives and Strategies: A2a, A2b.**

- D. Necessary Capital Projects and Purchases** – LA-MSID has been very diligent for the last 20-years, constantly rebuilding ailing infrastructure and replacing capital equipment. Recently the District completed the CREST, Phase II Project. We have replaced or constructed 119+ water control structures (weirs). We have replaced 121 of the 375 culvert crossings. Our capital equipment is replaced on a revolving plan and is kept up to date. We have sought out and cemented partnerships with peer organizations/agencies to secure funding for crucial capital projects without the need to increase assessments.

*LA-MSID will continue its program of a 4-Year Facilities Inventory (inspecting one-quarter of our infrastructure, every year), 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan (updated every year), Strategic Planning (updated every year), District modeling (updated this year) and a 5-Year Capital Purchase Plan (updated every year). The District has completed thirteen years of in-house culvert replacements (total of 85 culverts replaced in-house since 2010). The District will strive to meet our Rain-Gauge based storage goals. Staff is constantly looking for alternatives to lower costs or increase efficiencies.* **Objectives and Strategies: A2b, F1a, F3f, F3b.**

- E. Equipment and Infrastructure** – LA-MSID owns and maintains its own fleet of heavy equipment, mowing tractors, spray equipment, vehicles, and smaller mowing equipment. LA-MSID has the responsibility and ability to maintain 311 miles of canals, 25 lakes, 375+ culvert crossings, 22 bridges, 119+ water control structures and 2000+ acres of preserves in a manner that the community can be proud of. We are always looking for ways to further enhance our maintenance practices.

*LA-MSID strives to retain highly skilled employees. We strive to preserve the necessary institutional knowledge and to provide needed services in an efficient manner. The District continually reviews needed projects, for implementation. Management evaluates both cost benefits and reviews staff’s advanced skills to try and bring projects in-house when possible. Currently, the District is able to replace failing culverts with in-house staff. The in-house replacement of culvert crossings saves the District approximately \$50,000 per culvert. LA-MSID needs to continue this in-house replacement process. LA-MSID’s staff also has the skills necessary to perform many of the maintenance and repair activities needed to maintain our fleet of vehicles*

*and heavy equipment. This enables LA-MSID to maintain the District's infrastructure and virtually eliminate outside costs and down time. Objectives and Strategies: A1b, F1a, F3f*

**F. Funding for Future Bridge Failure and Maintenance**

This item has gone from a weakness to a strength. The District owns 22 bridges that were built between 1958 and 1992. To date, there has been only minor maintenance performed based on findings of State bridge inspections. The time is coming when LA-MSID may have an expensive repair or even a failure.

*The District should continue to address the potential short-fall of funding in 2025-2026. The fund currently has \$1,381,798, less any maintenance expenditures for the rest of the year. This is about enough to replace one entire bridge. The funding should have the ability to fund (1) yearly maintenance, (2) minor or major repairs, (3) replacement design & permitting and replacement construction. There is a possibility of LA-MSID giving away roughly 8 bridges to Lee County over the next 8-10 years, as they alter them. Objectives and Strategies: F3i.*

**5. OPERATIONS**

- A. Additional and Improved Policies** – LA-MSID has an extensive list of policies and procedures in place and is constantly updating them to stay current. There has been a lot of discussion at the Board table about additional policies. LA-MSID has recently re-vamped our Finance Policy.

*Staff should pursue drafting new or updated policies with vigor, as the need arises. Soon, we will be creating a Succession Policy. Objectives and Strategies: A1a.*

- B. Sense of Community** – While the Board of Commissioners and staff have always put F.S. Chapter 189 and 298 powers prescribed by the state and its special acts at the forefront, they are also very much in tune with community organizations and their activities. If there is any way to provide a win-win situation for LA-MSID and the local community, the Board will seriously consider the action.

*The Board and staff attempt to always be in-tune with the community's needs. LA-MSID needs to continue its collaboration with all related planning organizations to ensure the best potential outcome for our residents, as it relates to our powers. The Resource and Relations Director has implemented several community-based, educational events that have been widely applauded and well attended. Outreach and Education efforts are just a way to reach our community but are integral parts of our reporting for grants, MS4 and NPDES reports and is integral to the overall success of the programs; as the District grows and the community grows so will the outreach efforts. The Leeland Bottomless Lake presents an opportunity for LA-MSID to create more community spirit and cohesiveness. The land has been purchased by LA-MSID and the legislature has approved the funding for the purchase of the adjacent building and improvements on the parcel, we are waiting on the Governor's consideration. Objectives and Strategies: A2c, A2e.*

## WEAKNESSES (Internal)

### 1. FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AND GROWTH PLAN

#### A. Lack of Stormwater Storage

In 2007 and with updates, LA-MSID has charged AIM Engineering and ADA Engineering with the task of modeling LA-MSID's stormwater system. The main goal of the model is to simulate build-out in Lehigh Acres, along with simulating various 25 to 100-year storm events to determine what will happen within LA-MSID's borders as well as the impact to areas downstream of LA-MSID. The model results indicate that LA-MSID was approximately 15,000 acre-feet short of storage at full build-out of Lehigh Acres. That is equivalent to a lake that covers six-square miles, four feet deep. In November 2016, an extensive update to our District-wide model was completed. As part of ongoing negotiations with Lee County regarding the Alico Road to Sunshine Blvd. extension and widening, Lee County has agreed to provide a District-wide modeling update in 2026.

*LA-MSID should continue modeling efforts to become more precise. In addition, we need to evaluate various project options and take the most responsible course of action to alleviate the storage shortfall and any other concerns. The Board and staff are working diligently to find, design and build the proper infrastructure to stay ahead of this shortfall, while being sensitive to the economic conditions. With the 2026 modeling effort, we will learn about our abilities to meet future needs. New projects may grow out of that. Objectives and Strategies: A2a, A2b, F2a, F2b.*

**B. Vulnerability of Aging/Failing Infrastructure** - While the District has done a good job in repairing or replacing failing culverts and water control structures (weirs), there is an abundance of culverts and bridges in our system that could fail over the next 20 years. The cost of replacing each one of our 22 bridges could range between \$2 million to \$4 million, when you factor in both the design and construction cost. In addition, we have approximately 225 remaining metal culverts in our system that could start to fail at a rate of 10-15 per year. Currently, they are failing at a rate of 5-6 per year. It has become apparent that our first modern sharp-crest weir, built in 1995 has become obsolete and cannot meet today's demands. A brand-new weir is planned.

*Staff must continue its infrastructure inspection efforts by inspecting one-quarter of the District's infrastructure each year. The Board needs to stay apprised of all developments related to failing structures. The Board will need adequate lead time to make preparations for funding and replacement. Staff should continue its efforts to repair and upgrade water control structures each year. Talks should continue with Lee County with an emphasis toward their ownership of the bridges and roadways over the culverts and their participation in the culvert replacement projects. Bridge repair and replacement was a hot topic in 2019 and provided a new revenue stream in 2020. The District should look at setting up a fund to management growing needs, emergency needs, and growth of staff and office space. Debt Service is set to fall off in 2030 and a strong goal would be to have a healthy fund established by this time to address future needs. The ownership of several Bridges in the Sunshine Blvd. corridor may be impacted by the Lee County Road project. At that time ownership of the affected bridges may revert to Lee County. Objectives and Strategies: A2b, F1a, F3f, F3i, F3m, F3o, F3r*

**C. Lack of Adequate Maintenance Space on Right-of-Ways** – When LA-MSID and Lehigh Corporation dug our canal system in the 1950s through the early 1990s, attention was not given to ensure that canals were dug in the centers of the rights-of-ways. In some isolated cases, just enough land was secured for the width of the canal, rendering maintenance nearly impossible with conventional methods. The end result, is that the District has approximately 128 miles of canals with little or no room for District equipment to access and maintain the canals. The District purchased two remote controlled slope mowers since 2020, that staff expects will be a valuable tool in helping to maintain the 12.5-mile weed eating circuit.

*Staff must continue to develop new and innovative ways to achieve more efficient maintenance methods, while eliminating existing inefficient maintenance areas using “outside of the box” solutions. Objectives and Strategies: F1a, F3j, F3l, F3a*

**D. Administrative Storage Space Growing Short** - Our administrative building is now twelve years old and we have run out of storage and office space. Storage items include: hard-copy paper records which we must maintain to satisfy public records laws; events equipment and materials; safety and hurricane supplies; electronic equipment, chairs and tables. The Barrett Room is growing in popularity and we often need to temporarily store excess items while the room is in use. In FY23, shipping containers were purchased for new, on-site storage space. They have been outfitted to suit current storage needs.

*Staff will continue to monitor the situation and will notify the Board should LA-MSID need to implement an additional onsite storage option. Objectives and Strategies: A1d.*

## 2. PERCIEVED IDENTITY/MESSAGING

While this item has not transitioned to a District strength, we are making great strides in our efforts to raise awareness of the District. The agency has been in operation for 68 years and until the mid-2000s public education was not an objective of the District. We understand educating a diverse and growing population with limited resources/budget will take time. Staff has updated a website and maintains social media sites, puts out news releases, creates and delivers community presentations and educational programs to help identify LA-MSID. The Resource and Relations Director works with community partners to create educational opportunities for residents and key target audiences. We have developed a District mascot, Able Otter, to help brand LA-MSID and educate residents and he is a hit! LA-MSID’s Resource and Relations Director has been very active in a strong attempt to make this a District strength.

*With increased and improved news releases on social media, we have seen progress in community awareness, but a majority of the public is still not responding significantly and accurately to LA-MSID’s identity and mission. District activities usually get good coverage. Staff needs to brainstorm about new methodologies to clarify and improve our recognition. Staff has organized many successful special events, secured grants, received awards and prepared multiple public relations plans and grants but, perhaps, suffers somewhat by the lack of funding for District-wide outreach activities. Staff had provided a small outreach budget, but a majority of funding comes from grants and community sponsors to implement outreach programs.*

*LA-MSID’s educational, public, and internal programs have received regional and state awards and recognition. In 2016, LA-MSID earned several local and state honors/awards for its public relations programs – Weather Station. The annual “WOW Festival” makes large strides toward increasing the*

*public's ability to discover Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District! The Supervisor of Election's use of our facility as a voting precinct has made an impact on the public in that zone of where and who we are. Other local government agencies and community organizations have displayed a growing interest in hosting meetings and events in the Barrett Room. The District has won awards for engineering and design of some of our key projects on both local and state levels, drawing attention to the innovations.*  
**Objectives and Strategies: A2e, A3a, F3n.**

### **3. TECHNOLOGIES**

**A. Deficient Data Collection for Select Maintenance Activities** – LA-MSID has reliable computer programs to collect data for accounting, time-keeping and complaints. For many years, LA-MSID has relied on staff-developed Microsoft Access databases and Excel spreadsheets to collect data, from mowing, spraying, canal clean-out, water quality, etc. These databases began to fail and become unreliable. Staff turnover also contributed to this data-collecting deficiency. Staff has continued to provide on-paper records for daily maintenance activities. Staff has begun the process of looking for inclusive replacements for some databases.

*Staff should focus their efforts to finish the fuel monitoring and database system, as well as a vehicle and equipment repair database. The answer may lie with a comprehensive government maintenance software program.* **Objectives and Strategies: F3h.**

## OPPORTUNITIES (External)

### A. POLITICAL AND RESIDENT SUPPORT

LA-MSID enjoys an era of very favorable status with Representatives and Senators in the Florida Legislature. We also have experienced a rather long period of smooth operations due to system improvements and a Board that has worked very well together for a long time. This provides an overall favorable opinion of the District. The District has been very successful working with the legislature in 2025 securing \$3.8 million.

*Although LA-MSID has a very advanced and celebrated public information program, the District needs to continue to step it up another notch in the use of the media information program and also continue to educate the public through the use of brochures, events, partnerships, PowerPoint presentations, etc. This may include increasing funds available for outreach for ads, events and materials, etc. Additionally, there will be an increase in networking to build relationships with key community organizations and leaders. Information can also be disseminated through the school system and other suitable public forums. LA-MSID has produced a professionally-made educational video and has plans to update it frequently for use as a marketing tool. Objectives and Strategies: A2e, A3e, A3b.*

### B. COOPERATIVE EFFORTS WITH ENTITIES

There are several entities that need LA-MSID's support or cooperation to help cut the cost of their respective projects. FDOT and LDOT often need fill dirt and stormwater storage ponds for road projects. LA-MSID can help them in their endeavors by thinking "outside of the box". Developers need access to our water control system in order to provide a positive drainage outfall; Lee County Parks Department needs additional land for park projects, etc. Offering our assistance to these different entities can also pave the way to strengthening our professional relationships. Cooperation through memberships, awards; assistance with grants; working with Cathy Olson and the Bird Patrols at Harns Marsh; Lehigh Community Initiative in community trash removal events; and other projects can benefit LA-MSID and our assessment payers. SFWMD has always been a great partner with LA-MSID through the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Program and the Lehigh Headwaters Initiative. Continued efforts with FDOT with their road-widening efforts can vastly benefit both agencies.

*As entities contact LA-MSID for assistance with permitting, easements, etc., negotiations should ensure that will also facilitate the entity helping LA-MSID meet District goals. Objectives and Strategies: A2e.*

### C. INCREASES IN TECHNOLOGY

Technological breakthroughs can allow LA-MSID to complete tasks more efficiently, lower costs and use less manpower. Our Actsoft GPS Tracking software, remote-controlled slope mowers, drone and ROV operation are all good examples of this.

*Technology continues to evolve at a rapid pace. We must continue to keep our eye to the horizon through publications and organizations that stay current with new technology. The District will evaluate tools we*

*already have – for instance using GPS software to identify improvements in time management and work assignments to help reduce costs. The District should study available products and programs and training to help improve operations.*

#### **D. GAINING ADDITIONAL POWERS**

LA-MSID always keeps the needs of the residents within our District in the forefront to determine when help is needed. In 2015, Representative Matthew Caldwell championed House Bill 1255 in order to change East County Water Control District (ECWCD) from a Florida Statutes Chapter 298 drainage and water control district to a Florida Statutes Chapter 189 improvement district to provide a more clearly defined scope of services. On June 10, 2015 Governor Rick Scott signed House Bill 1225 into law dissolving ECWCD and transferring all of its acts, property, obligations, and liabilities to the newly created Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District (Lehigh Acres MSID). As part of this change, legislators provided language that would allow Lehigh Acres MSID to study new powers in limited areas such as: sidewalks, street lights, community signage, local planning, and water and sewer services.

However, these are not automatic powers. If the results of the study are favorable, the LA-MSID must first enter into an agreement with Lee County and present our community with a referendum vote in a regular general election. In 2018, LA-MSID successfully completed all of the steps to add community signage to our permanent powers. The referendum was successful at a margin of 70% voting in favor to 30% voting against.

*LA-MSID added signage powers and must continue to consider the needs of the District and the assessment payers to determine if adding powers will meet their needs. The Board determined that there was not enough support to pursue powers for the November 2022 General Election. The Board will study the need for other powers and make necessary connections with the County ahead of the 2024 Election and strive to present a referendum for a new power to the voters during this election cycle. **Recently, there is renewed interest in adding street lighting powers. An inquiry to Lee County Commissioners by Commissioner Bonacolta has revealed that there is interest in moving that forward following the current streetlighting construction phase.** Objectives and Strategies: A2c.*

#### **E. THE ECONOMY**

The nation and the residents inside of our District had been decimated by the housing slump from 2007 to 2012. This led to many foreclosures and up to 6% of uncollected assessments. Some residents experienced higher property taxes and all faced higher fuel prices, and moderate inflation. From 2014 to 2024, the economic outlook has greatly improved. The vast majority of delinquent assessments have been paid, housing prices have increased significantly and unemployment has decreased. Construction is on the rise and our population is at 135,000. There are some experts that believe that there will be a recession in the near future. According to the Lee County Community Development Office, during March 2025, contractors pulled 394 permits to build single-family houses collectively valued at about \$76.3 million in Lehigh Acres. That compares to 314 permits issued in March 2024 and 230 issued in March 2023, according to the Lee County Department of Community Development. There are mixed signals from the economy. The signals are split right between local and the federal level. From the local level, the housing market is booming, wages are on the rise and there are many job vacancies. On the federal level, the housing market is crashing, interest rates are holding at a high level and inflation is increasing faster than any time in the last 35 years. Unfortunately, the influx of people moving to Florida and inflation are driving up the cost of construction for new projects. In 2026, the war in Iran,

tariffs the war on cartels and other issues has the economy reeling. Time will tell whether these changes will create a stronger or weaker economy.

*LA-MSID has held steady the percentage for uncollectable assessments in the 2024/2025 taxes and has a surplus of revenue from 2024/2025 and Budget to actual reports indicate that staff had spent significantly less than budget. This can be used for future needs, i.e.: construction, land purchase, etc. Over the last couple of years, hiring has been difficult and employee wages for new hires have increased significantly. The economy is in flux which could put a strain on our budget. Objectives and Strategies: A.1.e., A.2.a., A.2.c., F2c*

## **F. BANK, STATE AND AGENCY FUNDING**

Bank funding has not been an issue of late. State funding through appropriations and grants have been so strong that LA-MSID has not applied for a loan since 2012. SFWMD, FDEP and state appropriations grant programs have been very well-funded, due to a revenue surplus. The State of Florida has created funding sources for stormwater projects through changes in the constitution and other means. The District has received funding for the ROBUST and Sinkhole projects from the legislature, pending the Governor's ability to veto. The District applied for Federal grants in the past and plan to apply for more as they become available. The District also received a \$15,500,000 Governor's grant in 2024.

*LA-MSID staff must stay in compliance with its existing loan and grant agreements and should also attend any educational opportunities offered by the funding sources in order to stay current. The Board and staff will continue efforts into improving our budgeting format to satisfy lenders changing requirements. The District had secured a low-cost loan in 2012 to refinance our campus construction. Cooperative grant opportunities from other agencies are becoming available because of forced planning efforts due to the poor economy and "out of the box" thinking by District staff. Objectives and Strategies: A2a*

## THREATS (External)

### 1. LABOR RELATION ISSUES

#### A. Union-Management Conflicts

LA-MSID Board and staff have worked hard to provide a fair labor contract for the employees and the assessment payers. A delicate balance must be maintained in the future. The District had negotiated a new 3-year contract for FY24-27. The contract is coming up for negotiation again in February 2027.

*The Board and staff must maintain open communication with union representatives and shop stewards while staying in compliance with the current Union Contract. Maintenance of a well-trained, educated, content and hard-working workforce is essential to LA-MSID, while providing salaries and benefits comparable to other agencies that have the same general mission and/or activities. Objectives and Strategies: A.1.a.*

### 2. REGULATIONS/UNFUNDED MANDATES

#### A. Loss of Chemical Labels or Availability/New Non-Native or Invasive Plants

There are several EPA approved chemicals that LA-MSID currently uses to combat undesirable vegetation in our canal system. Chemical companies must spend big budgets to maintain the testing needed to continue to sell their products. Sometimes they determine that it is not worth their efforts, or they realize that they are a sole-source provider and raise their price to a point that LA-MSID cannot afford the chemical. The EPA has required chemical manufacturers to change their safety labeling programs. This changes the National system of MSDS sheets to a Global Harmonized System (GHS) known worldwide as SDS sheets. These changes alone will have a negative impact on the cost of chemicals in the future. Southwest Florida's climate is ideal to support new plants as they are introduced to the area. Several species have been running rampant for years. Glyphosate and its potential link to cancer and its ability to convert into an environmentally damaging form of phosphorus is still a concern. If the EPA label was revoked for Glyphosate, staff would have to find new method to keep evasive vegetation in check.

*LA-MSID must adapt as needed, in order to utilize the least expensive and effective chemicals available, to maintain the canals. Staff will use the three-quote process to obtain the lowest chemical price available. Chemical pricing has become so volatile over the past 5 years that manufacturers are pulling chemicals off of active bid sheets. Staff also looks at application rates and the duration of plant control of all chemicals. This helps to determine which will provide the most cost effective and efficient means of plant management available. The chemical manufacturers will hopefully continue to develop products that will be safe and effective to combat the need to control these new non-native or invasive species. Objectives and Strategies: F3b*

#### B. Changes in Legislation

Special districts and their issues periodically come within the sites of legislators that wish to slash the overall tax burden for tax payers. Other types of governments have been forced to limit their revenues by new legislation. The legislature has not limited the Lehigh Acres Municipal Services

Improvement District's ability to raise revenues and to pay its bills. Additional unfunded mandates, may be enacted by the Florida Legislature or the Federal Government and may fiscally or otherwise impact the District, either intentionally or as an unintentional consequence. This year the legislature increased sovereign immunity limits from 200/300K to 350/500K. Our insurance rates will be increases accordingly.

*Staff and the Board need to monitor the bills that are presented during the legislative session in an attempt to impact the outcome for the residents of the District. We can do this by staying engaged with the Florida Association of Special Districts, the Florida Stormwater Association and through our District Counsel. Objectives and Strategies: A.3.b.*

### C. Federal Government Shut Downs

Major differences between democrats and republicans in Congress have caused lengthy shut downs in 2025 and 2026. Several departments are unfunded and must close down or operate at a much-reduced capacity. This has a direct effect on grant programs, regulatory oversight and permitting and training opportunities. Specifically, programs, such as the one operated by CHNEP (Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership) have grant funding delayed. LA-MSID projects under design will experience a significantly lengthy permit approval process, delaying construction. FEMA disaster training is not available.

*Staff and our professional services must act swiftly when the government is open, to satisfy our needs as quickly as possible. If there is any opportunity to self-fund some activities without losing grant funding, that should be explored. Objectives and Strategies: A.1.f*

## 3. FINANCIAL CHANGES

- A. **The Bond Market** –If inflation continues to moderate, the bond market will continue to moderate. In 2026, the economy is still stable, the bond market will be favorable. Loans have been the tool of choice for LA-MSID, but bonds should be considered in the future.

*The Board of Commissioners and staff should perform a cost-benefit analysis before authorizing capital projects. They should consider all avenues for funding. LA-MSID should examine the Bond market, bank loans, and push hard for grants and budget requests from the legislature to help fund the projects. Objectives and Strategies: A.1.e.*

- B. **Fuel Costs** – LA-MSID can be affected by fluctuating fuel costs as much or more than other entities, because the heavy equipment and vehicles used in our daily operations consume large amounts of fuel. World political and weather events have increased the price of fuel. Fuel prices are at their highest levels since the pandemic started. LA-MSID needs to maintain its current fuel capacity or more in the future in order to maintain its current level of service. The District invested in a new fuel monitoring system in FY 21-22.

*LA-MSID considers fuel efficiency when purchasing new vehicles and equipment. Alternative fuel options will be purchased when practical. LA-MSID is maintaining a fuel station on site that has made the staff even more efficient. Budgeting practices should allow for more than modest increases in fuel costs. New reporting requirements are requiring more fuel pumping accuracy. Objectives and Strategies: A.1.e.*

- C. **Rising Construction Costs** – Due to various pandemic, geopolitical, and supply and demand issues, construction costs have skyrocketed. What you could have built five years ago for \$100,000

would cost you today from \$150,000 to \$175,000. Obviously, LA-MSID will not be able to complete the volume or complexity of projects in the future, unless some of these effects are reversible.

*The District's General and design engineering companies, led by AIM Engineering, have an increasingly difficult job in projecting project costs. AIM Engineering and LA-MSID staff will be very conservative when planning projects until the rising costs de-escalate. The District has continued to seek funding through the Florida Legislature and available grant programs to fund these projects. Objectives and Strategies: A.1.e., A.2.c.*

#### **4. CHANGES TO DISTRICT MAKEUP**

##### **A. Population Growth**

The population within LA-MSID's borders was approximately 87,500 in 2010 and has increased. Lehigh Acres' population has been estimated by BEBR of the University of Florida for the year 2018 at 135,000. The actual census from 2020 reported a population of 115,000, which is underwhelmingly questionable. Certain segments of the population may be unwilling to be counted. In 2025, Lehigh Acres' population may stand at 150,000 or even more! Existing and new real estate prices are at an elevated level, but, regardless of this fact, there are many new housing starts. If the population continues to grow, the workload for employees will increase. Also with growth come more schools. As the School Board buys more land for new schools, more assessment revenue is lost, as we cannot assess school property.

*LA-MSID has considered a "built-out" scenario to determine storage priorities. Land acquisition priorities must be established. Design and construction can occur subsequently as our population increases. LA-MSID could make necessary land purchases while land prices are low and the population is not experiencing large growth. If LA-MSID delays land acquisition, LA-MSID may have higher land costs in the future. LA-MSID's Capital Improvement Plan can slow the planning for its immediate stormwater storage needs, while closing the need for storage for a current 100-year storm. The staff and Board must continue to plan for its future needs, while taking advantage of opportunities. Objectives and Strategies: A.1.e, A.2.c.*

##### **B. Loss of Access to Maintain ROWs**

As Lehigh Acres "builds out", LA-MSID will lose access to some of its rights-of-way. Currently, District staff can access waterways and easements through adjacent vacant lots. Maintenance areas with limited access will cost LA-MSID more to maintain.

*Staff must continue to perform a District-wide assessment to determine areas that will have no maintenance access and what the best solutions are for providing service. The District should study the District Map and identify areas where we have no, or limited easements/right-of-ways and establish a plan to gain access. Annual reviews of canal ROWs will identify encroachments. Objectives and Strategies: F.3.a., F.3.j.*

##### **C. Annexation into District Borders**

The City of Fort Myers borders a large portion of LA-MSID's western boundaries. Lehigh Acres' Industrial Park is in LA-MSID's boundaries and is a possible target of annexation.

*LA-MSID must be aware of any attempts by the City of Fort Myers to annex inside LA-MSID and to become active in dialogues to determine the best course of action. HB 1255 by Matthew*

*Caldwell has a non-annexation provision to protect LA-MSID in this regard. Objectives and Strategies: A2j.*

#### **D. Creation of a Stormwater Utility**

In the past, Lee County has proposed a stormwater utility for the unincorporated area of the County that could nullify Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District's authority and would potentially dissolve LA-MSID.

*LA-MSID must stay involved in any discussions that Lee County may have, involving the creation of a stormwater utility in Lehigh Acres and to help determine the best outcome for Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District and the residents of Lehigh Acres. Objectives and Strategies: A2j.*

#### **E. Incorporation**

There has been in the past and will be future attempts to incorporate the Lehigh Acres area. The creation of a city may include the absorption and dissolution of the Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District, if a public works department is established.

*LA-MSID must keep a vigilant eye open for attempts to incorporate Lehigh to make sure that the new charter does not include the immediate and/or total absorption and dissolution of the Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District. The Lee County Legislative Delegation and LA-MSID's Commissioners had stated in a resolution that the road to incorporation runs through LA-MSID. The District will be considering that option over future year, although there is not a political will to do that, of late. Objectives and Strategies: A2J.*

#### **F. Community Development Districts**

Community Development Districts (CDDs) can hold almost as many powers as a city and have been reasonably easy to create. They can be created by Lee County Government inside of LA-MSID's boundaries, if they are under a certain acreage threshold or otherwise created by the state. CDDs can erode LA-MSID's powers. As of 2025, there are few parcels that would be large enough, if developed, to be a Community Development District.

*LA-MSID must stay in contact with Lee County (creator of most CDDs) and local legislation for attempts by developers to create CDDs in Lehigh Acres and to do what is necessary to guarantee that they do not conflict with the powers of the District. Objectives and Strategies: A2j.*

### **5. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: NATURAL OR MAN-MADE**

#### **A. Water Quality Issues**

Different components from the Clean Water Act of 1964 are moving ahead simultaneously. Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL's), Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) and the Numeric Nutrient Criteria (NNC) for Water Quality will be imposing standards for sampling and/or an impetus for capital projects in the future. The District's water quality is very good, but the standards may be set so low that we can't meet them. The Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) may be so rigid that we may have to improve our water quality, even if we meet the water quality standards. The potential unfunded mandate may require that capital dollars be spent, which can severely affect our assessment rates and the ability for our residents to pay them.

*LA-MSID will stay involved in the process of rulemaking by EPA and FDEP to both lessen requirements while ensuring that water quality standards are fair and obtainable. Future budgets may have to be adjusted to reflect the addition of water quality projects, if very strict standards are adopted. Currently, the District has met the BMAP requirements for the first five-year period plus, on the estuarine portion of the Caloosahatchee River. Future requirements will have to be met for the Freshwater portion of the Caloosahatchee River and any NNC requirements on state-wide waterbodies. Community outreach and education efforts are necessary parts of meeting these requirements. Objectives and Strategies: A2b, F1a, F3c, F3g, F3h, F3p.*

## **B. Natural Disasters**

As evidenced by Hurricane Irma (2017), Ian (2022), Helene and Milton (2024), the region could have been better prepared. The staff's internal disaster plan contemplated the vast majority of issues and situations that a hurricane can cause by having immediate available data on the operational status of our many water control structures in an easy to read, consolidated form. We also have redundancy in communication capability. Finally, we do have emergency backup power in a ready to use form with automatic switchover capability. Satellite internet, satellite phones, and a manual full of contact information are readily available in an emergency. These updates fared pretty well during Hurricane Ian.

*Staff will research the possible solutions for these and other minor issues. The Hurricane Manual needs to be updated yearly to include procedures based on our experiences. Objectives and Strategies: F4a, F3q, F4a.*

## **C. Pandemic, Epidemics and Other Outbreaks**

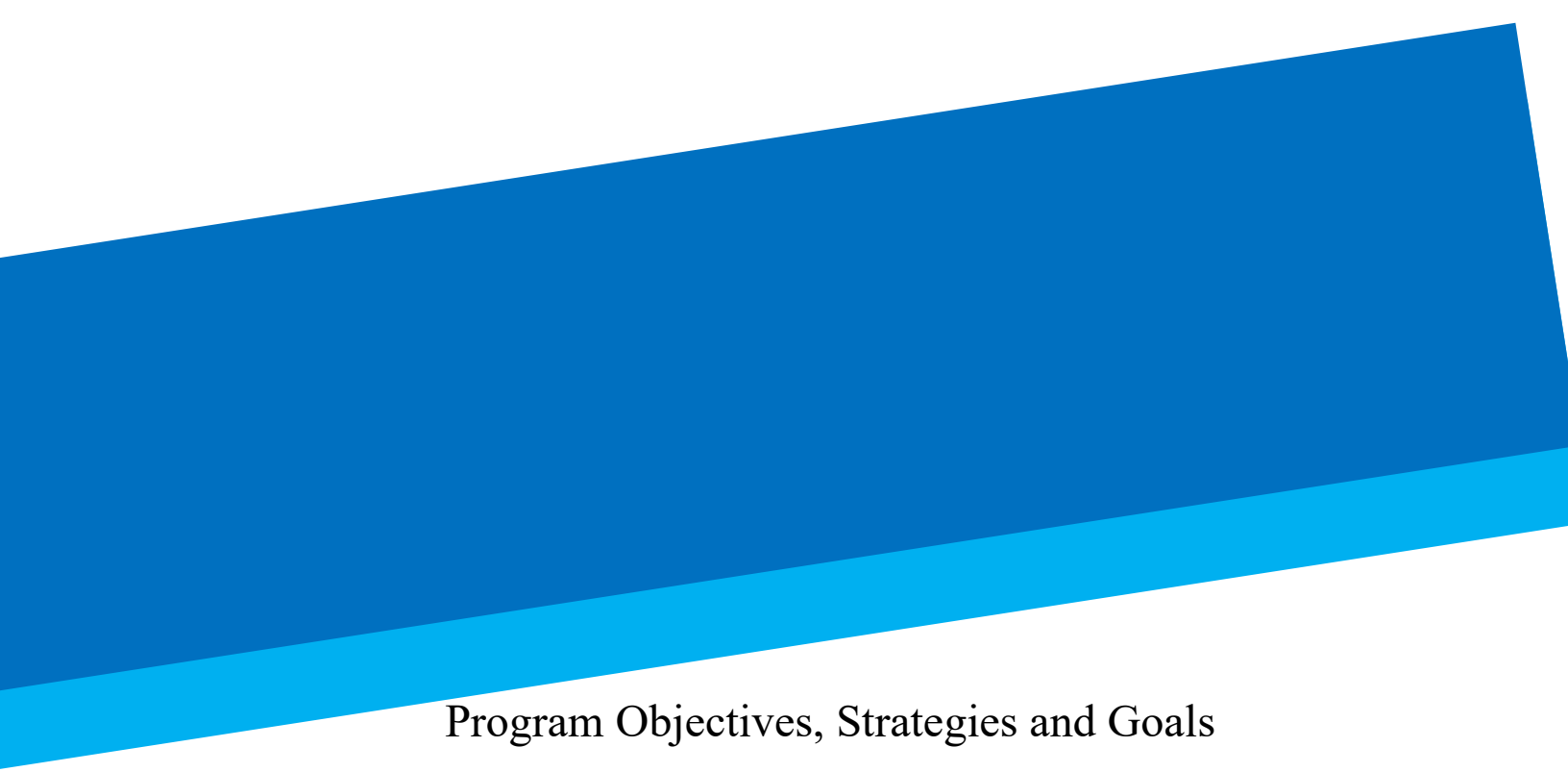
Local emergency preparedness plans at the Municipal District have traditionally focused on response to natural disasters, such as hurricanes. Yet historically, the most significant threat to the world's populations has not been natural disasters, nor war, but disease. Because influenza pandemics are recurring events, it is not a question of whether there will be another pandemic; it is only a question of when the next one will occur and how severe it will be. As we learned at the start of 2020, when a pandemic strikes the trajectory is everchanging and rapid.

*The District needs to create a Pandemic, Epidemic and Other Health Outbreaks Incident Plan to define the non-medical issues and challenges associated with a crisis of this nature. The Plan will help the District ensure essential services can be maintained, the best degree possible, in the event of a pandemic or other such health event. This plan supplements the Municipal District's Policy and Procedures Manual and Emergency Support Functions already in effect. Objectives and Strategies: F4b.*

#### **D. Insurance Liability Issues**

With a 100-square mile District, it is hard to monitor activity on all district lands. We do not have enforcement powers, and if someone is “caught in the act” of engaging in prohibited activities, they have usually left the scene before Sheriffs arrive – if the Sheriffs are even available to come. Despite the District’s best efforts to partner with agencies to curtail the use of ATVs – they are still running amuck. The District has seen a spike in insurance claims by individuals using atvs on district lands- an illegal act. To curtail this, the District may one day in the future need to put in thousands of signs throughout the District at structures and along ROWS. Also, some issues to examine with developments near District bridges that have changed traffic patterns. In 2023, legislation was approved that improved the tort law and the ability to win lawsuits when the plaintiff is 51% or more at fault. In 2025 legislation failed that would have relieved special district’s liability on District lands. Maybe 2026 will provide a better outcome.

*The District should continue to monitor ATV activity on District land and assist officers who do catch individuals (officers usually need a District employee to trespass an offender). Efforts should be made to fight the ATV claims through our insurance company, if possible. Bridges and traffic patterns should be reviewed and documented for the future replacement and subsequent traffic pattern change that could occur at that time. **Objectives and Strategies: A3b.***



## Program Objectives, Strategies and Goals

**Goals:** are statements needed for every key result that LA-MSID deems necessary for success.

**Objectives:** are strong, target ends for stated goals or final results of a strategy.

**Strategies:** are a pattern of measurable actions and resource allocations designed to achieve the objectives of the LA-MSID.

**Tactics:** are the tools or the action items of the plan

## ADMINISTRATIVE GOALS

**Goal A1:** To provide administrative staff the resources necessary to complete the mission of the Board of Commissioners.

### OBJECTIVES:

**A.1.a: The District must create or modify policies to ensure that the District is in compliance with the changing times.**

Current, accurate, fully encompassing policies are essential to provide staff with the tools to operate, regulate and implement the Board's intended approach when dealing with the public and employees.

*Strategy: Staff needs to either create, review and/or update at least three policies, Collective Bargaining Agreement or Employee Manual for Non-Bargaining Unit in this fiscal year.*

*Strategy: Staff should create internal SOPs forms and three SOPs to help streamline efforts in this fiscal year.*

**A.1.b: Recruit, develop, and retain a highly trained and safe workforce with the budget available.**

LA-MSID will provide necessary training to all District employees in Administration, Finance and Field positions. LA-MSID continues to invest in employee professional growth and development through continuous training, certifications, education, and professional accreditation. LA-MSID strives to cultivate employees' understanding of District operations and their role in the agency's success. Management should continue their professional growth and development and receive accounting, human resources, management, record keeping and public relations training, and other such trainings, on an annual basis. Due to

the current economic situation, the workforce shortage and the impending \$15 minimum wage is a few months out, there is already a push for increased wages.

*Strategy: All employees will receive at least one training session during this fiscal year. LA-MSID will provide a fair and current collective bargaining agreement. The District will continue to provide annual harassment training, spill response and health and wellness presentations/training.*

*Strategy: LA-MSID will strive to provide competitive pay and benefits that recruits and retains top talent within the available budget and will review job descriptions in FY 2026/2027 to ensure they are up-to-date for the evolving market. Bi-annual Salary Surveys/Job Description Audits to ensure we are remaining competitive.*

*Strategy: LA-MSID will strive to expand employee diversity, while hiring the most qualified candidate.*

### **A.1.c: Strive to maintain low personnel expenses.**

The District can save money by not allowing employees who have been discharged for “just cause” collect unemployment.

*Strategy: The District will have no more than one new paid unemployment claim in fiscal year 2026/2027.*

### **A.1.d: District Staff will use the campus to be as efficient and effective as possible.**

The Commissioners have provided a modern campus that provides utilitarian administration space, a multi-purpose room, up-to-date maintenance facilities, and a fuel station. However, the site is not conducive to keeping our equipment out of the weather.

*Strategy: Management and support must correct any damage to campus facilities immediately. Regular maintenance must be performed to ensure that the campus retains its “new” appearance and workability. Staff will find proactive solutions for lack of space for equipment storage and staffing.*

- *The District will rehab the internal storage space in the Serrano Building as an in-house project to allow for more on-site storage for equipment needs.*
- *The District will look for grant funding for expansion of the building and storage*
- *The District will re-surface all asphalt areas within our campus boundaries.*

**A.1.e: District Commissioners and staff must expect up-tics and downturns in the economy.**

The economy is going to experience change over time, to the good and to the bad. Sometimes a bad occurrence (such as a Hurricane Ian event), can cause LA-MSID to spend some non-budgeted funds. This can be transformed into an overall good by tracking your costs for reimbursement from FEMA.

*Strategy: the Commissioners will maintain non designated reserves above the 50% of expense spending, regardless of the lower-end target being 25%.*

**A.1.f: District staff and professionals should expect federal budget shut-downs during periods of political strife.**

We are in a period of vast political differences between the democrats and republicans that does not appear to be letting up soon. We have many projects that will be in need of federal permitting in the next year, i.e. ROBUST, Frank Mann Preserve and the Leeland Sinkhole.

*Strategy: Staff and professional must be expeditious in periods when the federal government is open. All federal permits must be filed for ROBUST, Frank Mann Preserve and the Leeland Sinkhole in FY 2026.*

**Goal A2:** Provide for the lowest possible assessment rates, while providing the necessary services for the residents inside and downstream of the LA-MSID borders.

**Objectives:**

**A.2.a: Strive to increase revenue for capital projects and/or maintenance.**

The District has been very creative in finding new revenue sources in the past, for capital projects and/or maintenance. We need to look for new sources such as cellular towers, tree and mulch sales companies or fees for discharges from outside of our borders. The District has been successful finding for design and construction funds for Section 10. Grants were secured from FDEP and fees were secured from FDOT for West Marsh project, Phase III and for CREST, Phases II and III, the Leeland Bottomless Lake and ROBUST. The development in Lehigh Acres is continuing at a rapid pace, this increase in impervious areas impacts how our system works. The opportunity to secure large parcels to secure the necessary stormwater storage is quickly lessening and in 10 years' time may be non-existent. The District has a way to go before achieving the storage needs addressed in 2007 and those needs have only increased with the increased development. The time is now to protect our natural resource and our community.

*Strategy: Staff will identify one additional alternative revenue source in FY 2026/2027. Staff will hold strategy meetings and may attend seminars relating to alternative revenue strategies.*

**A.2.b: Projects identified in the Capital Improvement Plan should continue to progress forward and projects that are designed and permitted should find a revenue source to fund construction.**

Projects such as Frank Mann Preserve/Section 10 and CREST are either under or nearing construction and need to continue that process. Other projects should move forward in the queue into design and permitting to be included in the next wave of “shovel ready” projects. Several projects have been outlined in the Post-Irma Report paid for by Lee County and many will be incorporated into our plans. The June 2024 unnamed storm brought significant rains and highlights areas of Lee County’s system and ours that need improvements.

*Strategy: Staff will continue the construction process on all projects funded by outside sources. Frank Mann Preserve/Section 10 is funded. CREST is funded and in progress. ROBUST, Phase II & Phase III are funded. Additional funding for the Leeland sinkhole should be pursued.*

**A.2.c: Pursuit of Additional Powers/Authorities**

On June 10, 2015, ECWCD was dissolved and LA-MSID was created. The powers of sidewalks, lighting, planning and water and water and sewer can be exercised through an agreement with Lee County and a majority vote from the voters in a referendum. If LA-MSID acquires new powers and needs to use assessments for a new revenue source, the District would have to amend its Water Control Plan. This would then be an ideal time to pursue some of the additional powers, as the cost for a Water Control Plan would not be required solely for those powers. In 2018, the District added Community Signage to the active powers. Due to COVID-19 the installation of the monument on Lee Blvd. was delayed. The Board authorized a feasibility study on the water and sewer powers. Prior to COVID-19, the Board began drafting a request to Lee County for formal consideration. Currently, there is a political stalemate on the issue of new powers for LA-MSID.

*Strategy: The District will observe conditions within its borders and the opinions of the residents to determine the optimal time to begin the process to pursue additional powers. This could make the willingness to gain new powers more palatable. The District will continue to study and work with the County to move forward on street-lighting power in 2026.*

**A.2.d: Financial staff has to remain diligent in their analysis of the District’s financial records and the ever-changing rules of accounting.**

*Strategy: Maintain an unqualified audit opinion for our FY 2026/2027 Annual Financial Audit.*

**A.2.e: LA-MSID will remain to be a viable, independent, proactive, and pertinent agency in Lehigh Acres.**

As the population continues to grow: (1) more impervious surface is created and a greater need for stormwater management will exist, requiring proactive planning today for a safe and secure future for tomorrow (2) a potential increase in the restructure of existing government agencies may arise.

*Strategy: LA-MSID should stay strong, stay connected to all surrounding and related agencies and continue to support FASD and their lobbying efforts.*

*Strategy: Efforts to protect the Leeland Bottomless Lake should continue. Since the Governor denied the 2024 appropriation for the improvements for the lake parcel and the interpretive center purchase, LA-MSID should move ahead with a new planned building on the 19-acre site or the older church building purchase in that priority order, as determined by FDEP. As of July, 2025, The Legislature and the Governor have appropriated \$2.2-million to the Purchase of the interpretive center and restoration and the creation of the park site.*

### **A.2.f: Follow the Succession Plan**

Staff skill-sets have improved vastly over the last 10 years. Consequently, when a staff member is lost, there is a substantial learning curve for the new employee, hired from the inside or outside. Staff should make all efforts to have an understudy cross-trained to eliminate or lessen the impact of losing a key employee.

*Strategy: LA-MSID has completed the Matrix Consulting Group's study process. Staff should follow the new policies for the Succession Plan in this fiscal year, in anticipation of meeting all goals within a reasonable amount of time.*

**A.2.g: Automate routine reporting functions.** Operational Financial & Human Resources reporting functions for the most part have been done manually and automated reports had some of the necessary components missing. Staff has corrected some of these reports but there remain a number of reports that need to be revised to better suit reporting needs.

*Strategy: LA-MSID should review and/or program one report functions in the fiscal year.*

### **A.2.h: Evaluate Internal Growth Solutions**

LA-MSID has become self-sufficient when it comes to providing for outside events and flexibility in the multi-purpose room. Staff has been creative when storing the additional materials needed for those events. Should the District procure additional items or hire additional administrative staff, office space will become an issue. All conceivable air-conditioned space is being used and all consolidation options have already been exhausted. Staff has secured on-site, air-conditioned storage.

*Strategy: Staff should explore all necessary storage space expansion options in this fiscal year. Creating a plan to expand the District headquarters may be necessary sooner rather than later and would allow for both growth of staff, storage and an improved emergency operations center.*

**A.2.i: LA-MSID should use the time management system to its capacity.**

Staff can now track time worked on culvert projects by using TMS to clock into specific projects and hours worked can be tracked. This has cut down time spent transferring hours into the payroll system.

*Strategy: Continually implement updates to the TMS to include better reporting functions and mobile use.*

**A.2.j.: Maintain LA-MSID’s identity as a hometown special district as long as it is necessary.**

There may be a threat from the outside that could change the identity of the District. Other forms of government that may attempt to usurp our authority are Annexation by an adjacent city, incorporation of a new city, a county may attempt to create a stormwater utility or a community development district may be created within our borders.

*Strategy: Staff must continually monitor the organization or re-organization of the agencies within and outside of our District boundaries. We must also stay financially fine-tuned as to not attract the hungry wolves.*

**Goal A3: Expand and Enhance Community Outreach and Engagement**

The Municipal District should be a visible and recognizable with stakeholders statewide and locally – within Lee and Hendry Counties and especially with the residents of Lehigh Acres.

**OBJECTIVES:**

**A.3.a: Build External Customer Relationships & Awareness**

*Strategy: Staff should continue to increase local, related information dissemination, and communication and engage our community on the importance of the District’s services through informative articles, social media, newspaper, events, and other avenues.*

*Strategy: LA-MSID will hold one public relations event for students, one community event, and will make presentations at five organizational meetings and/or be actively involved in the community in FY 2026/2027.*

**A.3.b: Maintain a strong reputation in the community by expanding presence in the community, both in-person and virtually, to ensure residents have accessibility to their local government.**

*Strategy: Assess and create opportunities for stakeholder awareness/engagement. An opportunity to conduct targeted outreach to citizens who may be impacted by the Municipal District construction projects.*

- *Meet educational water efficiency Best Management Practices (BMP) through school educational initiatives*
- *Continue to host the annual Wings Over Water Festival community event.*
- *Establish a community event for the Sinkhole property to engage and educate individuals, help support the growth of this parcel and help create a sense of community,*

*Strategy: Assess opportunities to increase constituent awareness. Staff should maintain membership and stay active with legislators, local civic and professional organizations/groups; apply for industry awards in this fiscal year.*

**A.3.c. Maintain Necessary Amount of General (Liability, property, vehicle) Insurance while Actively Trying to Limit Liability on Public Lands and Workspaces.**

*Strategy: The District will review all assets (automobiles and equipment, buildings, bridges, and water control structures) on a yearly basis to ensure that we have coverage for the entirety of them.*

*Strategy: The District should approach Lee County regarding Williams Ave. and their willingness to take over ownership and maintenance responsibility.*

## STORMWATER OPERATIONS

**GOAL F1:** Operational Optimization - Ensures ongoing, timely, cost-effective, reliable, and sustainable performance improvements in all facets of its operations.

### OBJECTIVES:

**F.1.a: LA-MSID will adhere to the latest Five-Year Capital Equipment Replacement Plan.**

Adherence to this plan is necessary to ensure that the District's maintenance can be performed in the least amount of time with current staffing levels.

*Strategy: The District will purchase all items identified in the 2026/2027 Capital Equipment Replacement Plan. Fuel efficiency shall be a strong consideration when specifying new vehicles or equipment for purchase. The Field Department will work to organizing data for vehicle use and field tracking to help provide informed decisions for maintenance and replacement.*

**Goal F2:** Provide the infrastructure and programs necessary to deliver optimum flood protection, aquifer recharge, water quality enhancements and habitat for the current and built-out scenarios.

### OBJECTIVES:

**F.2.a: - The District should continue the process for design and construction of planned capital projects, in FY 2026/2027.**

The design for Frank Mann/Preserve and the design of ROBUST are in progress. The District will proceed with the project when design is finished. CREST, Phase III is under construction.

*Strategy: During FY2025-2026, the District should proceed with design and construction for the Leeland Bottomless Lake, Frank Mann Preserve and ROBUST. Any applicable grants should be applied for.*

*Strategy: Partner with local governments and the state to identify multipurpose project partnerships that reduce flooding, improve water quality, while increasing natural or augmented recharge to the aquifer, as well as saving time and resources.*

### **F.2.b: LA-MSID should alleviate intermittent flooding on Bedman Creek.**

The District needs a conveyance diversion from Dog Canal to Hendry Canal and Carlos Waterway, when Bedman Creek is at full capacity.

*Strategy: The District has just about completed construction CREST Phase III. Continue to complete this project in 2025/2026. The Dog to Hendry connection has been available for use since the summer of 2024. Continue progress on the ROBUST project to provide further protection for the residents on Bedman Creek.*

### **F.2.c: LA-MSID should fill its employee ranks.**

Staff has a saying: “Hiring employees is like getting married”. It’s that important to pick the right employees. The employees should be hired on merit and how well they meet our needs. If our needs won’t be met, it’s better that we wait for the hire with the right skills. LA-MSID has continued to elevate hiring wages to meet the needs of the economy. We usually have 2 to 4 positions open at any time.

*Strategy: Staff will continue to search for the employees that meet our needs on a continual and urgent basis. The right employees may only be available for a short period of time. We strive for full employment!*

**Goal F3:** District Field staff will strive to provide the highest necessary maintenance levels on District Lands as prescribed by the Board, the economic conditions and requested by the public.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

### **F.3.a: A mowing and weed-eating strategy for District lands must be adhered to.**

The mowing crews shall mow the flat areas and the slopes where LA-MSID has adequate maintenance access, District wide. This is necessary to 1) provide stability for slopes, 2) maintain stormwater conveyance, 3). Provide visibility for herbicide treatments; 4) safety; 5) water quality and 6) community pride. The weed-eating crew shall maintain slopes with little to no maintenance access that have been identified by management. The Field management staff shall continue to do their best to eliminate “down time” and keep the mowing crews operating for a large percentage of the growing season. Special projects should not cut into the mowing crew’s time.

*Strategy: LA-MSID will look for new strategies to complete three mows and three weed-eating circuits per year, while being quicker and more efficient.*

**F.3.b: Herbicides should be used at label strength to control exotic and/or nuisance aquatic vegetation to compliment mechanical cleaning.**

The plant control staff should maintain LA-MSID canal and lake systems for existing and new emergent, and submersed, plants that are invasive or non-native or nuisances. Staff should provide chemical mowing and broad-leaf control on slopes and flat areas, yearly.

*Strategy: LA-MSID will conduct at least two complete plant control treatments, as needed and where needed, to maintain conveyance. The Field management staff should make sure the canal inspections will be ongoing and that each canal will be assessed and treated for its individual vegetation needs. The District will stay in tune with organizations that promote the use of herbicides and manufacturers of herbicides to help to ensure that effective and cost-effective herbicides are available in the future.*

**F.3.c: Mechanical cleaning should be used to clean decomposed, exotic or nuisance vegetation to compliment the herbicide program.**

The canal cleaning process involving the track hoes and the bulldozer clean-up, shall make the rounds through LA-MSID's entire canal and lake systems approximately every seven years, as prescribed by the NPDES Permit.

*Strategy: LA-MSID will mechanically clean or inspect to determine the lack of need to clean 1/7 (approximately 14.3% or 44.43 miles) of all canals per year. We should mechanically clean or inspect to determine the lack of need to clean 5/7 of the District canals in the next five years. The Field management staff shall do their best to keep the track-hoe and dozer crews operating on canal clean out for a large percentage of the year. Special projects should not significantly cut into canal cleaning time.*

**F.3.d: Narrow or non-existent vehicle-accessible maintenance area on Lakes or canals.**

Staff has been able to master the use of the tracked zero-turn mower performance through training and in-house modifications of the machine. That should not terminate staff's quest to find a better method to maintain these areas.

*Strategy: Staff will continue to search for new methods and equipment that can make the maintenance in these narrow right of ways, easier, safer and more efficient. Review the District maps to see if there are areas in which we can purchase land or create easements for access.*

**F.3.e: Staff had gotten behind in preserve maintenance and needs to catch up.**

The District needs to allocate more staff that may include temporary workers to reach this goal. LA-MSID has added 205-acres of preserves in the West Mash and 25-acres in CREST, Phase II. Soon another 75-acres will be added in CREST, Phase III and 560-acres in Frank Mann Preserve (GS 10) and the 19-acre Bottomless Lake parcel.

*Strategy: LA-MSID will remove exotics on 10 non-maintained acres this year and for the next five years, while not losing control of existing acres cleared since 2008. Continue progressing on Lennar's responsibility to provide a one-time removal of exotics in the Savanna Lakes preserves.*

*Strategy: LA-MSID will explore sub-contracting yearly exotic maintenance in our preserves. One new contract should be awarded as a test-case.*

**F.3.f: LA-MSID will continue the culvert replacement program. Corrugated metal pipe culverts are failing at 5 to 6 per year and should fail at an increasing rate over the next 15 years.**

These “rebuild” projects must be completed to “keep up” with the potential growing amount of failing culverts District-wide.

*Strategy: Field staff will replace an average of five or six more culverts “in house” each year, or provide the equivalent in in-house construction projects.*

**F.3.g: The District will fully understand and comply with the current and future requirements from State and Federal authorities on water quality law and issues.**

The District has had 8 out of 9 years without comments on our annual NPDES Report. There was one comment last year due to a formatting error.

*Strategy: Strive to have zero comments on our Annual NPDES Report, and be the most compliant and diligent co-permittee on the Lee County NPDES Permit.*

**F.3.h: LA-MSID shall maintain the integrity of our field data and will keep our telemetry sites operating at their full capacity.**

The telemetry employees will fully test each site and will comply with all FCC regulations. Data will be secured in newly-developed maintenance and work order software.

*Strategy: Staff shall continue to work to secure additional maintenance and work order software that is user-friendly, efficient and comprehensive in 2026/2027 In areas of vehicle/equipment usage, fuel usage, chemicals, Requests for Actions, etc.*

**F.3.i: The District’s bridges need to be maintained in the highest possible condition.**

Our 22 bridges were built from 1958 to 1992. Every two years, the State (FDOT) hires an engineering firm to inspect our bridges. We will have the 2024 report that identifies any needed work or deficiencies. The good news is that we have had no serious problems with our bridges. All identified items in the latest report can be repaired with in-house staff.

*Strategy: The District shall make repairs as needed. LA-MSID secured a funding source, to not only self-insure our bridges, but to also provide funding for minor & major repairs, replacement and design services. Discuss with Lee County the increased use and issues with William’s bridge.*

**F.3.j: The District will continue to clear its rights-of-ways.**

The District has identified all uncleared right of ways. With the advent of GIS and the Lee County Property Appraiser Site, we can easily identify our rights-of-ways.

*Strategy: The District will clear one (1) mile of right-of-way, or the equivalent of 3-sq/acres this year.*

**F.3.k: LA-MSID must limit equipment down-time to a manageable level.**

The main enemy of the District’s maintenance program is down-time. Downtime can be created through absenteeism, organizational issues and equipment malfunctions. Equipment malfunctions can be caused from poor design, careless operation, poor maintenance or heavy use under harsh conditions. As we add more to our fleet, we need to increase our data collection and monitoring. Consider sending routine services outside for repair to free up mechanic times.

*Strategy: The mechanics will service all vehicles when scheduled within a 1,000-mile window prior to and after the due date and report any signs of careless operation or abuse.*

**F.3.l: The District shall provide easier and safer maintenance access roads along our infrastructure.**

The District’s access roads are often blocked by a Lee County road ditch. That may force staff to back up their equipment and find an alternative route to continue their work. A considerable amount of time is lost because of this. For many years, staff had been installing ADS pipe across the ROW, to provide safe crossing for our vehicles and equipment. Because of Hurricane Irma, staff has not been able to provide this service for the last few years.

*Strategy: The District will install 10 to 30 pipes in Lee County outfall ditches or the equivalent of turn-arounds or future access points, this year.*

**F.3.m: LA-MSID’s infrastructure (culverts, weirs, buildings, etc.) needs to be inspected on a regular basis.**

The District needs to inspect the District’s infrastructure to protect our investment, the resident’s properties and the water resources of the District. Our NPDES permit also requires regular inspections.

*Strategy: District staff will inspect at least 25% of the culverts, water control structures, parks and buildings annually or comply with new state requirements.*

**F.3.n: Providing good resident service is essential for the District’s image.**

Resident issues are called in on almost a daily basis. These issues are logged in a database by issue and resolution to ensure that all issues are resolved.

*Strategy: The staff shall resolve all known resident issues prior to a resident coming to a Board Meeting, if it is within staff’s power.*

**F.3.o: The District’s water control structures (weirs) need to be kept in the highest operation readiness condition.**

Staff needs to look at items such as structural integrity, painting (where necessary) and reconditioning of all moving parts.

*Strategy: Staff will recondition two water control structures per year, for the next five years.*

**F.3.p: Trash on District lands continues to be a big problem and must be kept under control.**

Because of remoteness and the fact that water bodies are at a lower elevation than surrounding lands, our infrastructure is a collection point for illegal dumping along with windblown garbage and floating trash.

*Strategy: The District will remove at least 50,000 pounds of trash in FY 2026/2027.*

**F.3.q: Wash-outs in our canal system must be corrected within a very narrow window because of their ability to disrupt conveyance and increase our liability.**

Washouts are generally caused by the loss of bank stabilization (usually vegetation). Vegetation can be destroyed by poor mowing techniques, ATV and four-wheeler traffic, misuse of chemicals and severe weather events. The resulting wash-outs can become rather large, allowing for poor drainage along with being a vehicle and pedestrian safety hazard. Hurricane Ian had exacerbated this situation and has created approximately 150 additional wash-outs. Staff has totally caught up.

*Strategy: Wash-outs will get repaired ASAP and there will be no reported accidents, injuries or flooding due to washouts.*

### **F.3.r: Special Projects Must be Completed Yearly.**

During the dry season each year, the District staff re-gears itself to complete necessary special projects. The projects are identified by October prior to dry season.

*Strategy: Staff shall complete at least 90% of special projects identified in the October Gantt chart prepared by the District Manager. Special projects should not cut into mowing, spraying or mechanical clean-out goals.*

### **F.3.r: Streamlining of Reporting**

The District has decades of paper logs that need to be made digital. The district hired a professional to create a database to manage field data – RFA, Spray and Mowing Reports, but the creation of the databases has been moving slowly.

*Strategy: Work with designer to fix the identified issues in the first database and begin design of additional databases, and a return of paper records for vehicles, fuel, chemicals, etc. should be implemented while the technology is being developed or purchase an all-encompassing program.*

## **Goal F4: Improved Emergency Response Preparedness**

### **F.4.a: High-level of Hurricane Preparedness.**

Actual Hurricane experience learned from the direct hit from Hurricane Irma and Ian has caused staff to revise our methodologies in preparation and our actions during/following an event.

*Strategy: Staff will annually review the Hurricane Manual prior to Hurricane Season; will host a Hurricane Training exercise and will ensure safety supplies are in stock to the best of the District's ability.*

### **F.4.b: Preparing for Health Emergencies**

The COVID-19 pandemic caught many agencies off-guard. It has been 100 years since a pandemic had occurred, and guidance changes depending on what type of disease/virus is spreading. The District worked with Labor Counsel and District Attorney to formulate understanding of best practices. The District Attorney steered staff away from creating policies to navigate health crises.

*Strategy: Maintain a list of PPEs that would be multipurposed for any type of crisis and prepare/maintain emergency kits that can be placed in storage and accessed when needed in 2026/2027. Create and maintain an outbreak, epidemic and pandemic policy.*