Q) Do you support installing disinfection technology at Stickney, the world’s largest wastewater treatment plant?

A) It is important to prioritize and evaluate the current disinfection projects underway at the Calumet and O’Brien plants. It is important to prioritize these two projects because they will have a more direct impact on the water quality in the Chicago waterways used by Cook County residents and visitors for recreational purposes. The Stickney plant feeds into the Sanitary & Ship canal. It is also important to evaluate the two different methods—chlorine and ultra-violet—being tested at these two plants through the 2016 recreational season to monitor its impacts on water quality. I would take a final position on this issue after evaluating the impact of MWRD’s current disinfection projects along with its cost to taxpayers.

Q) How would you improve the current phosphorus-removal plans underway at the MWRD? Do you think this important? If so, why?

A) Phosphorous removal is important for improving water quality in our region as well as reducing nutrient loading in the Gulf of Mexico. MWRD is in the process of installing a new phosphorus recovery facility at the Stickney plant that will remove phosphorus from treated wastewater and turn it into a slow-release fertilizer that can become a new revenue source for the district. When this facility is fully operational, it will remove more than 1,100 tons of phosphorus from the waste stream, likely meeting the EPA’s regulations for discharge of nutrients into the Chicago waterways. I am also interested in an innovative process MWRD is looking into utilizing at the O’Brien plant called Clearas Water Recovery that would use algae to remove phosphorous and other nutrients that can be used to produce bioplastics.

Q) Do you support any alternatives to maximize the capacity of the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan? Which ones do you support?

A) When it comes to Cook County’s stormwater management needs, there is no single strategy that will fix this problem. The TARP is one of the country’s largest infrastructure projects that will include world’s two largest reservoirs, but even when completed it will hold the equivalent of less than two inches of rain on the county’s surface. I support targeted local tunnels and reservoirs similar to what MWRD is doing along the river in Albany Park. I also support programs like Space to Grow and other initiatives that partner with other public agencies to utilize public land and publicly acquired land for water retention

Q) What do you think the MWRD’s role should be in reducing chloride usage?

A) MWRD should play a leading role in working with municipalities to reduce chloride loading in Chicago waterways. The runoff from use of road salt is a major factor harming aquatic life and degrading water quality in the Chicago waterways. MWRD should continue to contribute to research in alternative products and application regimes.

Q) What should the MWRD’s role be in reducing combined sewer overflows? What is the MWRD’s role in informing the public about CSO’s? How would rate the MWRD’s performance in informing the public about CSO’s, and why?

A) In addition to the strategies provided above to maximize the capacity of TARP, there are additional stormwater management strategies that can be utilized to reduce flooding and CSOs. I support a wide variety of strategies including the expansion of green infrastructure, wetland restoration, increasing permeable surfaces across the county, as well as developing new techniques to keep objects out of sewers that promote stoppage. I also support changing state law currently prohibiting water recycling. Allowing developers, residents and manufacturers to utilize gray water systems can save tens of millions of gallons of water from being drained from the Great Lakes and from going down the drain, providing relief for our combined sewer system.

Community education is crucial to addressing this problem. It is important to inform the public about CSO’s, as well as what their role in helping to reduce them. We need more general education about water conservation, as well as specific information about reducing water usage during rainstorms to prevent CSOs. I would seek partnerships with public schools, community organizations, and other public agencies to help MWRD do this more effectively.

MWRD has made great strides in increasing the county’s stormwater capacity and reducing CSOs. The completion of the Thornton reservoir last year was a significant accomplishment.

Q) How do you the see role of wastewater treatment agencies changing over the next 10 years?

A) MWRD has undergone a major shift from being a sanitary district to taking on the challenges of stormwater management and the opportunities of resource recovery. Wastewater treatment agencies will continue to move in this direction over the next ten years and can play a key role in investing and expanding new strategies that not only improve water quality, reduce flooding and help the environment, but also create new green industries that produce alternative energies and resources that provide additional revenue streams for their districts and taxpayers.

Q) Should the MWRD set a goal of making Chicago area waterways clean enough for swimming?

A) Yes. It is a lofty goal, but an important one that MWRD can help accomplish with other agencies over time.

Q) What should the MWRD’s role be in addressing Asian carp and other invasive species in Chicago area waterways?

A) MWRD should continue to work with other agencies to continue to address this issue. The existing electric barriers have helped stem the progression of Asian carp and other invasive species towards the Chicago area waterways. There are additional short-term strategies that utilize sound and light to deter Asian carp that can be explored to reinforce current strategies. MWRD should play a leadership role in convening various researchers, advocates and agencies to continue to evaluate the specific strategies that were laid out in the Army Corps of Engineers Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study.

Q) The MWRD is Cook County’s second largest landowner. Does the District have a responsibility to ensure companies to which it leases land are good environmental stewards?

A) Yes. MWRD should review its contracts to not only ensure that the proper standards are in place, but that there are strong enforcement and accountability measures are also in place.

Q) How would you rate the current performance of the District?

A) MWRD is a very well run agency. It is in fantastic fiscal shape as one of the few agencies with a AAA bond rating and its pensions resolved with union support. And it continues to make great progress on stormwater management and resource recovery.

Q) What should the District’s role be in coordinating efforts with other government agencies in the Chicago area watersheds to manage those watersheds?

A) Cooperation and coordination with other agencies is both challenging and crucial. MWRD has no mandate over other government agencies, but it can educate, convene and work in partnership. MWRD can play a powerful role working with municipalities and actors within a region to provide technical assistance and support their efforts to update their local ordinances and address their strormwater challenges.