

IN PURSUIT OF A BALANCED URBAN ECOLOGY IN THE MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED

WHAT: Everyone who lives and works in the Minnehaha Creek Watershed is part of an intricate urban ecological system of natural and man-made parts. Finding ways for these parts to work in reasonable harmony is the key to achieving the balanced, sustainable and ultimately successful communities we seek. Rather than viewing the natural and built environments as a clash of opposing forces, we recognize the inter-related and inter-dependent character of modern life; communities cannot thrive without healthy natural areas, and healthy natural areas become irrelevant without the interplay of human activity. This is the integrated setting in which we live.

As caretakers of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed, we aim to manage our natural resources within this broader ecological context. Recognizing the integrated relationships of our surroundings, we seek also to integrate our work with that of other partners in the public, private and civic sectors. This kind of genuine community collaboration provides our best hope for protecting and improving our water resources while attaining the economic growth and high-quality built environment that will work to the benefit of all.

WHY: *We will be more effective if we work in partnerships.* A healthy natural environment is in everyone's best interest. Adopting that truth as an over-arching principle will help us to protect and sustain the lakes, streams, wetlands, wildlife habitat and public green spaces that are the signature of our metropolitan area while also helping to grow our economy in responsible ways. Indeed, our quality of life and our economic wellbeing are inextricably linked. Any notion that land development and environmental protection are locked in a winner-take-all battle is sadly outdated.

Unfortunately, government structures haven't quite caught up with that reality. Land-use activities continue to be primarily the focus of private enterprise as well as the various planning, zoning, public works and job-creation agencies in several layers of government. Meanwhile, other interests, mainly non-profits and other government agencies are focused on conserving natural assets and protecting them from the damage that development can inflict. No single entity has the authority or the resources to cope with all of these questions, or to strike a reasonable balance. That's why collaboration is so important.

Successful, sustainable, livable communities are built on a foundation of *integrated* planning – planning that recognizes communities as living organisms and takes into consideration all components of the urban ecology. Our work will be strengthened through these collaborative efforts. Not only will they offer greater community impact, they will produce creative public-private funding opportunities that will leverage scarce resources and maximize benefits. Going it alone is no longer the best path forward.

HOW: Three guiding principles will drive our actions:

- ***We will join with others in pursuing our watershed management goals.*** Success will be built on collaborative efforts among multiple partners in various sectors. The aim will be to develop a deeper understanding of the needs and desires of communities in order to design watershed projects that are more broadly conceived and appreciated, and that enhance social and economic viability as well as environmental benefit. To accomplish this, the MCWD will work with other government agencies, private landowners and developers, and philanthropic partners in cross-jurisdictional settings. We can serve in any number of roles in seeking to improve land development decisions, enhance water and natural resources planning, advance job creation or expand recreational activities. In this way, watershed initiatives are more likely to contribute to the broader project of building successful, sustainable communities.
- ***We will intensify and maintain our focus on high-priority projects.*** While our approach will broaden, our focus will not weaken, nor will our attention span diminish. Complex water management issues require perseverance as well as a cooperative and creative spirit. Our aim will be to develop high-impact projects through a sound public process, one that is transparent and open to the contributions of community stakeholders. At the same time, we will not neglect the more routine needs of the entire watershed. It is through the trust and depth of human relationships that organizations perform best. Our aim is to focus and to sustain: to seek new projects but not to forget our responsibility to operate and maintain that which we've already built.
- ***We will be flexible and creative in adapting our practices to those of our partners.*** MCWD will provide a safe harbor for bold, creative thinking among all partners. Rather than erect barriers, we will encourage projects that incorporate the investment plans and the capital improvement programs of our partners, recognizing the greater potential benefits that can come from leveraging various assets. With our partners, we will seek new ways to forge effective public, private and civic sector collaborations that benefit the environment, the economy and the social wellbeing of our communities.