

- WATERWISE:  
CITY OF ST. LOUIS PARK
- MCWD MISSION & NEWS
- WATERSHED HEROES

## WaterWise: THE CITY OF ST. LOUIS PARK

### St. Louis Park's Creative Approaches to Chronic Flooding Problems

#### *Long-Range Water Management Planning, Utilities Fee & a Clean Water Partner in the Chain of Lakes All Part of Strategic Solutions*

St. Louis Park was founded in the 1850s as a village of immigrants seeking land and a better life. Back then, it was a wide-spread rural area located west of the growing city of Minneapolis. The rural village became a city in 1886. Unlike neighboring towns whose founders chose idyllic names for their cities such as Golden Valley and Richfield, the founding fathers of St. Louis Park chose to name their new city after the Minneapolis and St. Louis railroad line, adding "Park" as a distinction from St. Louis, Missouri.

Today, the city is a fully developed, inner-ring suburb, with a mix of residential and commercial development. Back in the 1940s and 1950s, when St. Louis Park was undergoing post-war residential development, many of the city's wetlands were filled and converted to public parks. Because of the wetland storage capacity loss, (wetlands function as large sponges, absorbing excess surface water), St. Louis Park periodically experienced flooding in certain parts of the city.

Because of these chronic problems, the city planned and implemented an arsenal of strategies to combat flooding. The process started in 1997 as a result of intense summer storms and floods. The city council directed the public works engineering department to address the problem by developing a plan and by identifying funding sources for implementation.

"We identified 22 problem-flooding areas and produced a feasibility study for each area, including the cost of fixing the



*An example of St. Louis Park's stormwater retention ponds, located at 32nd and Sumter.*

problem," said Carlton B. Moore, St. Louis Park Superintendent of Engineering. "Our improvement strategies included flood-proofing homes, developing ponding areas, reconstructing storm sewer pipe, redirecting stormwater and lowering areas in city parks for temporary storage areas during very intense storm events."

#### ***Priority Solutions For Stormwater Runoff***

The city prioritized problem areas, focusing on the number of homes affected and the degree of flooding. Within the critical areas, problems ranged from broken storm sewer pipes and chronic house flooding to blocked stormwater run-off. A stormwater utility fee, allowed by the Minnesota State Legislature, provided the funds to fix the city's high water issues. A state law allows local units of government such as cities and townships to charge residents fees that are specifically applied to help with stormwater runoff and other flooding problems and to fund

*Continued on page 3*

operations and maintenance costs.

"We've made a significant investment in flood protection, erosion control, and water quality improvement," noted Jeff Jacobs, Mayor of St. Louis Park. "Eighteen of the 22 original flood areas have been corrected. We have also identified an additional 10 flood-prone areas that we will be working on in the coming years."

The city's water resources management plan is another tool to fight flooding. The plan provides the city with administrative direction for stormwater and water resource management activities and it fulfills several obligations, among them to local watersheds, including the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) and Bassett Creek. It also incorporates state wetland laws, state and federal laws regarding stormwater discharges, and other state agency requirements. The plan applies both Nationwide Urban Run-off Program (NURP) standards for the design of new stormwater management ponds and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) best management practices (BMPs).

### ***City Parks as Temporary Holding Areas***

"Stormwater run-off is a big issue for us as a developed community. There aren't many places for the water to go. We've had to recreate natural water storage and retention systems," said Moore. The city's engineering department took a lead role in addressing these concerns in a novel way, creating temporary water retention ponds in park areas to help with flooding. "Seventy years ago, the city filled in wetlands and raised them up for public park land. This elevated what were natural stormwater retention ponds. Now we're going back to some of these parks and lowering areas to provide temporary water storage during rainstorms," explained Moore.

The city eventually utilized fields in five city parks and turned them into temporary holding basins. The only remaining park project is Lamplighter Park in the Bassett Creek watershed area, which is scheduled for improvements next fall and winter. Because of differences in topography, landscape and recreational use, each park and its fields have been planned individually for stormwater flooding capacity.

For example, the Lake Street Park located near the St. Louis Park High School, had two hockey rinks resting in low-lying areas. The hockey rinks were relocated to another park and the fields converted to stormwater retention ponds. The newly opened area was planted with aquatic vegetation. Roxbury Park had an area of flat land that was converted into a holding basin. Stormwater previously was discharged into the park but had nowhere to settle. In Keystone Park, the ball field was lowered and made into a

soccer field that will also serve as temporary ponding for the storm sewer pipe surcharge.

"Most 100-year storm events are over in a day," noted Moore. "These basins are used recreationally the rest of the year. We decided that it's more practical to flood a soccer field for a couple days than allow flooding of homes. However, we continue to make people aware that there will be street flooding and yard flooding. There's no getting around that."

The city also works with property owners to raise or flood-proof structures through a city-run grant program. The engineering department works with the homeowner to determine the extent of the flooding while the homeowner pays a percentage to get the work done to flood-proof the home.

Years ago, the stormwater and sanitary systems were continually expanded in St. Louis Park as more homes and businesses were built. During heavy storms, sanitary storm drains were backing up into people's basements. Now the city has replaced portions of the stormwater and the sanitary lines and mapped the system on computer, making it much easier to provide better stormwater management. "We had a few system problems," said Moore. "So we recommended rebuilding portions of the drainage system. This approach gets to the source of the problem."

Initiated in 1997, the capital improvement plan for the stormwater system was laid out as a three-year program. "Most cities design their stormwater systems for three-year events. We looked at our system, including pipe capacity and decided we needed to have capacity for a five- or 10-year storm event," said Moore.

### ***The Clean Water Partnership***

Although St. Louis Park lost and has now recreated some of its natural stormwater-holding ability through its park-and-ponds conversion, the city also has numerous small ponds and lakes such as the Twin Lakes subwatershed around it, which holds and cleans stormwater run-off. "We know that stormwater can be a major source of pollution," noted Moore. "Since we contribute to the drainage into the Minneapolis' Chain of Lakes, we believe our water quality is important." Twin Lakes drains into Cedar Lake which, in turn, empties into Lake of the Isles in Minneapolis.

St. Louis Park was also a member of the nationally recognized Chain of Lakes Clean Water partnership, one of the largest, most successful urban lake restorations in the United States. Started in 1994, this six-year, \$8.1 million program was

*Continued on page 3*

St. Louis Park, continued from page 2

a team effort headed by the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD), the City of Minneapolis, the City of St. Louis Park with former Mayor Gail Dorfman, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), and Hennepin County with assistance from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, (MPCA). Several wetlands were restored on the border of St. Louis Park and Minneapolis, positively affecting water quality in Twin Lakes and Cedar Lake and areas downstream.

“We know as a community that cleaning and protecting our water resources benefits our residents and other communities beyond our borders. That’s why St. Louis Park is committed to continue environmental water stewardship,” concluded Mayor Jeff Jacobs.

Watershed Heroes, continued from page 4

Springs from the impact of the Hwy 62/55 construction without substantially changing the cost of the project. Senator Sabo co-sponsored the 2001 bill protecting the flow to the springs, working in concert with Skoglund, Ozment and her fellow legislators. The bill was passed unanimously in the Senate chambers, then passed in the House before being signed into law by Governor Ventura.

Victor Gilbertson (FAIA) a retired architect, painted numerous watercolors of Minnehaha Creek and its bridges, which illustrate the enduring value of the area’s natural environment. Gilbertson’s expressive artwork, underscored by his personal dedication to preserving the Creek’s beauty in his lovely paintings, is now available in his book, *Watercolors of Bridges over Minnehaha Creek*, from the Glade Press (1-800-777-3454).

## Dear Reader,

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) began strategic and governance planning this past fall with its staff and board of managers in order to better serve readers such as you who have a professional interest in regional water resource issues and solutions. We’d like to share some pertinent highlights with you.



As part of the planning process, our watershed district’s mission statement was examined, discussed and updated. The board managers believe the mission statement articulates the public purpose that the MCWD serves and defines the MCWD’s audiences, its operating values and beliefs. It is the engine and heartbeat of our organization.

### Our newly updated mission statement is:

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District is committed to a leadership role in protecting, improving, and managing the surface waters and affiliated groundwater resources within the District, including their relationships to the ecosystems of which they are an integral part, through regulation, capital projects, education, cooperative endeavors, and other programs based on sound science, innovative thinking, an informed and engaged constituency, and cost-effective use of public funds.

### Our decisions are based on

- The application of sound scientific principles
- Forward-thinking policies
- Cost recovery
- Creating incentives for positive change
- Goal-focused innovation
- Creating effective programs, projects, and policies
- Efficient use of public money

### We value public

- Participation
- Involvement
- Cooperation
- Partnerships

### We value the

**skills and  
experience  
that member  
communities  
possess**

### We value

- Healthy water
- Wetlands
- Wildlife habitat
- Water resources
- Healthy ecosystems

Our strategic and governance planning is an ongoing process. When the overall plan is completed, it will be available for the public to review on our website, [www.minnehahacreek.org](http://www.minnehahacreek.org) this coming spring. Your comments, questions and feedback will be encouraged and welcomed. Thank you.

Sincerely,

**Pam Blixt**

**President, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Board of Managers**

P.S. Help us save paper by subscribing to WaterPro electronically. Sign up to receive WaterPro at our web site at [www.minnehahacreek.org](http://www.minnehahacreek.org)

# REP. WES SKOGLUND, REP. DENNIS OZMENT, SEN. JULIE SABO AND PAINTER VICTOR GILBERTSON HONORED AS “WATERSHED HEROES” BY THE MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT



*The 2002 Watershed Heroes Award*

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) recognized three state legislators and one renowned local painter as “Watershed Heroes” on December 19 at the Minnetonka Community Center. The Watershed Heroes award recognizes sustaining contributions to watershed issues and awareness by citizens in the 180-sq. mile watershed. The four Watershed Heroes were acknowledged in a special recognition ceremony by the MCWD Board of Managers prior to its bi-weekly board meeting.

“Rep. Wes Skoglund (DFL, District 62B) Rep. Dennis Ozment (R, District 27A) and Sen. Julie Sabo (DFL, District 62) have done an outstanding job of helping to protect the water resources of Camp Coldwater Springs through their legislative efforts and leadership on the springs’ issue. Local painter Victor Gilbertson has immortalized the bridges and the natural environment along Minnehaha Creek in a beautiful book of collected watercolor paintings,” notes Pam Blixt, President of the MCWD Board of Managers. “We are grateful to them for their work and dedication in promoting and protecting our watershed assets in an urban environment where water quality issues continue to present challenges and workable solutions.”

The state legislators were key players in resolving disputes that delayed the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) construction of a controversial interchange at Highways 55 and 62. The legislatures worked closely to bring to resolution a plan that protected Camp Coldwater

*Watershed Heroes, continued on page 3*



Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper, 100% non-deinked pulp, using soy ink.

## Minnehaha Creek Watershed District

18202 Minnetonka Boulevard, Deephaven, Minnesota 55391

Phone: 952/471-0590 Fax: 952/471-0682 E-mail: [admin@minnehahacreek.org](mailto:admin@minnehahacreek.org) Web Site: [www.minnehahacreek.org](http://www.minnehahacreek.org)

District Office: Eric Evenson, Administrator

### Board of Managers

Pam Blixt, President Lance Fisher, Vice President Monica Gross, Treasurer James Calkins, Secretary  
Dr. Robert Schroeder Scott Thomas Dick Miller

Minnehaha Creek Watershed District  
18202 Minnetonka Boulevard  
Deephaven, MN 55391