



Title: Land & Water Partnership Initiative

Prepared by: Name: Kate Moran and Becky Christopher
Phone: 952-641-4512
bchristopher@minnehahacreek.org

Purpose:

Update the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) on the progress of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) [Land & Water Partnership Initiative](#) and gather CAC input on program clarity and next steps.

Background:

On [September 15, 2021](#), the CAC vetted recommendations for two key MCWD initiatives – the development of the Land & Water Partnership (LWP) program (previously referred to as the Responsive Program) and proposed improvements to MCWD’s Permitting Program to support MCWD’s partnership approach. Collectively, these two initiatives are now referred to as the Land & Water Partnership Initiative.

This initiative is focused on strengthening partnerships that support MCWD’s emphasis on impactful, collaborative projects that benefit the watershed and our communities. To achieve this, MCWD has been working to develop program improvements that strengthen the connection between land use and water planning, enhance our opportunity for collaboration, and identify new project opportunities.

Since the CAC’s last review, these program improvements have been further developed and are in the process of being vetted by a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) made up of city, county, and park agency staff. MCWD kicked off the TAC in October 2022, and it is expected to continue through May 2023. MCWD staff is actively collecting TAC input on the following areas of work:

- Shaping the proposed LWP program that will support partner-led projects through technical and financial assistance.
- Guiding improvements to MCWD’s Permitting Program to streamline process and promote early coordination.
- Exploring ideas for on-going engagement and collaboration.

Land and Water Partnership Program:

As a regional agency, the MCWD’s strategy is focused on delivering impactful projects that provide regional benefit. Throughout the watershed, land use changes such as private development or public infrastructure projects, create a window of opportunity for water resource improvements that may not reoccur for many years. The Land and Water Partnership (LWP) program is designed to identify these opportunities for integrated planning and develop collaborative projects that provide greater water resource and community benefit.

The LWP program provides technical and financial support for partner-led projects that provide significant water resource benefits. The program goals are to:

- Increase early coordination and integration of land use and water planning
- Leverage opportunities created through land use change to improve water resources
- Provide service and value to communities across the watershed

The LWP program is available to state, regional, or local agencies (e.g., municipalities) or a large-scale private developers or landowners with the capacity to lead project implementation. The program seeks to address priority water resource issues within the watershed, with particular focus on reducing stormwater runoff volume and pollutant loading to impaired waters and flood-prone areas.

The LWP program, unlike a typical cost-share or grant program, is designed to promote early coordination and collaborative project development. Through this approach, the MCWD and its partners can align goals and priorities and identify opportunities for shared investment to provide greater benefit to the region. To accomplish this, the program provides an orderly process for partners to coordinate during concept development so that prioritized projects can be integrated into MCWD's budgeting process and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for funding.

The proposed LWP program's scope, eligibility, schedule, evaluation criteria, and requirements have been vetted with the TAC. Currently, MCWD staff are working with the TAC to finalize program guidance materials. It is anticipated that the program will be ready for Board adoption later this year.

Permitting Program Alignment:

MCWD's Permitting Program exists at the nexus of land use change and water resource protection and is one of the most prominent ways in which MCWD connects with the land use community. The Permitting Program acts as a "front door" to individuals, municipalities, and agencies who want to alter the land in a way that may impact water resources and allows the MCWD to identify opportunities for improvement. Because of the program's frequent interaction with the land use community, it provides significant potential to accomplish the MCWD's goal of improving integration of water and land use planning.

The scope of program alignment includes:

- Rule revisions:
 - Streamlining and clarifying MCWD Rules' language, technical submittals, and procedural requirements to improve customer service and a more user-friendly experience.
 - Adjusting its regulatory scope and standards to align with other local and state agencies (e.g., comply with MS4 requirements).
 - Improving efficiencies by tailoring regulations to natural resource risk and project opportunities.
- Partnership pathways:
 - Developing formal partnerships with municipalities to improve coordination, reduce duplication of efforts, and leverage resources and capabilities between partners.
 - Creating clear processes for how it will identify and explore partnership opportunities with applicants.

March 15, 2023:

During the upcoming meeting, staff will provide an overview of the Land & Water Partnership Initiative, including updates on the LWP program development and Permitting Program's alignment work to-date. As MCWD staff prepare for the public rollout of the LWP program and Permitting Program improvement and rule revisions, MCWD is seeking the CAC's input on the following questions:

- Messaging - How would you describe the purpose of the initiative? What are the key messages? What is clear/unclear?
- Evaluation - How should MCWD measure the success of this initiative? What would success look like in 5 years?

Questions in advance of the meeting can be directed to Becky Christopher at bchristopher@minnehahacreek.org or 952.641.4512.