

**MINUTES OF THE VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT WORKGROUP OF
THE MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Monday, May 4, 2020**

Members Present

David, Girard, Ordway, Salditt

Managers Present

President White

Others Present

MCWD Staff: Kim LaBo

Agenda

Meeting was facilitated by LaBo and called to order at 11:35 a.m.

Discussion Items:

Volunteer Engagement Options- LaBo

The CAC workgroup framed considerations for staff who are evaluating when and how to move volunteer engagement forward – under the guidance set by the strategic plan.

Background:

On February 27, the Board of Managers approved a new strategic direction for MCWD's Outreach program. This new direction moves the program away from a focus on broad-based messaging about MCWD accomplishments and residential best practices, and toward context-specific engagement of audiences most immediately affected by MCWD's priority initiatives.

One component of the strategic planning process examined MCWD's "legacy engagement programming" – a group of annually-renewed contracts to provide broad-based outreach and engagement. The final plan calls for transitioning away from the broad-based outreach provided by this programming in favor of more targeted outreach, and lays out the following steps to do so:

1. Communicate programming shift to external partners
2. Improve engagement of existing Master Water Steward volunteers
3. Indefinitely suspend training of new Master Water Stewards
4. Discontinue consultant contract to support lake associations
5. Utilize the District's responsive program to assess lake association needs and provide a customized level of response based on issues and opportunities raised by associations
6. Strategically engage lake associations around district projects in their communities
7. Take a data-driven approach to defining MCWD's role in chloride management

Step 2, improving engagement of existing Master Water Steward volunteers, represents an important component of this transition. To carry out this step, the plan directed staff to review the current state of engagement – such as the number of volunteers and the activities undertaken – and develop a list of options for how to best engage these volunteers in the future. The resulting options presented to CAC members, such as volunteer liaisons to local advisory

committees, assisting with priority initiative community engagement and metrics collection, reflect the Outreach Program's strategic shift in legacy volunteer engagement.

Strategic Shift in Volunteer Engagement:

1) Refocus volunteer work

Historically, the Master Water Steward Program has engaged volunteers in implementing stormwater best management practices (BMPs) and broad-based education focused on behavior change. MCWD's new approach refocuses the purpose of volunteer engagement, away from supporting the installation of small scale BMPs and individual behavior change, to a variety of activities and roles which support key District projects and initiatives and engages audiences most directly impacted by key initiatives, such as volunteers who live in District project communities or focal geographies.

2) Strategically align volunteer engagement around MCWD's key initiatives

To complement the high-value outreach to tier one audiences (policymakers, city staff, developers) being completed through MCWD's program staff channels, the Outreach program will align and custom tailor outreach tactics in support of the District's key initiatives. One of these outreach tactics is volunteer engagement.

Each District initiative has a unique strategic context (e.g. water centric issues, physical landscape, policy needs, communities, relationships) that require a unique outreach strategy and configuration of tactics. Custom outreach plans will be developed that are tailored to support the specific strategic context of each key initiative. Future volunteer engagement will be determined by the needs of each unique outreach plan supporting the District's key initiatives.

3) Create nimble volunteer engagement, which is targeted, time-limited, and varies in scale

Rather than operating a stand-alone volunteer program, volunteer engagement will be integrated into priority initiative outreach plans. The scale of volunteer engagement, types of activities and roles, and length of time volunteers are engaged will be tailored to fit the needs of key initiatives and adjusted based on regular assessment and feedback from program staff, volunteers and other stakeholders.

CAC Feedback Process

CAC members provided feedback by reviewing the volunteer engagement options and completing an accompanying survey. Members of the volunteer engagement workgroup used this input from the broader Committee as the basis for discussing how best to shift volunteer engagement.

Below are key insights on the volunteer engagement shift:

1. The District will be engaging volunteers in a new way that supports the watershed district's key initiatives. Rather than a static program that is renewed annually, the new volunteer approach is flexible and time limited, with the roles/activities determined by the needs of the District priority initiative and the interests of local volunteers.
2. Master Water Steward volunteers are just one source of volunteers. Lake association members, residents who live near District projects and other community leaders are

additional volunteer sources that will be considered when developing outreach plans to engage volunteers around priority initiatives.

The CAC work group discussion and survey results were synthesized into the following recommended considerations for developing volunteer engagement options:

1. **Define what you want to accomplish.** There should be careful consideration of the goals and anticipated outcomes of any volunteer engagement activity.
2. **Identify what initiatives require or benefit from volunteer engagement.** The District should identify which 2-3 initiatives would benefit from volunteer engagement.
3. **Assess volunteer's skills and interests before developing an engagement initiative.** Master Water Stewards were interested and trained in stormwater best management practices and the objectives for volunteer engagement have changed. There should be an assessment of volunteer's interest and ability to engage in a new scope of volunteer work. If there are identified skills gaps but there is volunteer interest, additional training could be provided.
4. **Project staff capacity and cost.** There should be an understanding of the staff time involved in implementing any volunteer engagement option and the associated costs. Identification of outside groups, such as volunteermatch.org, could assist staff in pushing out volunteer opportunities and reduce the amount of staff time needed.
5. **Any new volunteer approach should be focused and time limited in the first year.** Piloting new approaches keeps costs down and tests whether an approach should be scaled up, adjusted or discontinued.
6. **The impact of external factors on the maintenance and management of the volunteer pool should be considered.** It will be increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers for volunteer engagement activities as the size of the volunteer pool shrinks either due to lack of new recruits or due to inactivity. The pandemic also impacts when and how volunteers may want to engage.

Next Steps

The feedback provided by the CAC, via survey and a smaller work group, will help shape the District's approach to volunteer engagement. Staff will incorporate CAC feedback into a recommended path forward for District volunteers. This recommended path, along with the findings and recommendations by the CAC, will be presented to the Board of Managers before a decision is made on how to move forward with implementation.

Work group adjourned at 12:45 p.m.