



Title: Citizens Advisory Committee Assessment: Recommendations

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Purpose: To review preliminary recommendations for aligning the operations of the CAC, based on the re-assessment process

Background

Over the past year, MCWD's Board, CAC, and staff have undergone an intensive process to examine the role of the CAC, in order to ensure it is providing maximum value to MCWD's work and serving as a worthwhile experience for members.

This process, which has followed a similar approach to realigning MCWD's other program areas, is entering its final phase:

- Defining the problem or opportunity
- Gathering data and drawing insights
- Defining the core value proposition of the program relative to the organization
- **Defining operational considerations based on value proposition**

In February and March, the CAC, Board of Managers, and staff discussed the core value proposition of the CAC. As a Citizen Advisory Committee, the committee has an important role to fill in ensuring the success of MCWD's work:

- Citizen: In contrast to the subject matter experts the District often taps for advisory support, the CAC brings a variety of professional backgrounds, geographic perspectives, and community connections that allows it to bring a broad, taxpayer perspective to MCWD's work.
- Advisory: As advisors, the committee's core role is to strengthen MCWD's work by leveraging its variety of perspectives to vet MCWD's key initiatives and associated communication. Rather than making binding policy decisions (like the Board of Managers), or carrying out the work and messaging of the organization (like staff and consultants), advisors help MCWD improve its key initiatives by asking new questions, challenging assumptions, and providing fresh perspectives on the work.
- Committee: As a dynamic group of people, rather than individual advisors, the committee provides a venue for multiple points of view to learn from each other, build on each other's ideas, and become greater than the sum of its parts. An effective standing committee is characterized by recruitment of members who are suited to the role, a schedule that ensures the committee is able to provide advice when it's most valuable, and a leadership structure that supports effective functioning of the committee.

In April, the CAC and Board of Managers discussed how the value proposition of the CAC should guide its operations, in order to optimize the committee around its core value and maximize the return on the investment of time from committee members and MCWD staff.

Based on those discussions, staff have put together preliminary recommendations for key CAC operations. The Board of Managers reviewed and refined these recommendations at its May 13 meeting. At the May CAC meeting, staff will review and seek the CAC's input on these recommendations.

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Recommendations

The following recommendations reflect the robust series of discussions among CAC, Board of Managers, and staff about how to best optimize the committee around its core value proposition.

These recommendations are preliminary and meant to serve as the basis for a round of discussion. They are not comprehensive; additional details will need to be decided as the changes are implemented. See the final page for a summary of the recommended changes.

Scope of work

To ensure committee meetings are focused on the committee's most important function, each CAC meeting will be structured around a particular MCWD key initiative at a snapshot in time. For instance, a key initiative may be related to a:

- capital project (e.g., design planning for the Six Mile Marsh Prairie trail system),
- planning initiative (e.g., development of the Long Lake Creek Implementation Roadmap),
- organizational project (e.g., developing a machine learning algorithm for optimizing the Gray's Bay dam), or
- engagement activity (e.g., community outreach related to 325 Blake Road Restoration and Redevelopment).

MCWD staff will present an overview of the initiative and facilitate a discussion that allows CAC members to provide advice on both the strategy of the initiative, and how it is being communicated.

Focusing each meeting on a deep dive into a single topic ensures that:

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- CAC members can bring their unique perspectives to bear on a variety of MCWD's most important initiatives
- Staff leading key initiatives are challenged to tell the "full story" of the project to a group of people who aren't immediately familiar with it; something they will need to do frequently during the lifespan of the project
- Committee members will stay informed about MCWD's key work by receiving comprehensive briefings on the highest-priority initiatives
- The benefit of the CAC's guidance will be spread across several key initiatives throughout the year

Examples: Advisory support from the committee may take the form of statements such as:

- *Reflecting back:* "Based on your presentation, here is how I would describe the strategy behind this project. ... Is that correct?"
- *Relating to professional experience:* "This reminds me of something similar I worked on at a previous job. What I found worked well in that situation was..."

- *On-the-ground observation:* "I saw a conversation on my NextDoor app about this project. You should be aware that a few people were wondering..."
- *Flagging clarity:* "The way you described the project was clear for the most part, and made me feel excited. One part that I didn't understand was..."
- *Creative suggestion:* "One way you might emphasize the key point is by comparing it to..."

Meeting frequency and schedule

The committee's advice is most valuable when it is tied to an appropriate milestone - and in MCWD's dynamic work environment, these milestones are often moving target. At the same time, CAC members, Board liaisons, and staff need to be able to plan around scheduled meetings.

In addition, attracting and retaining talented CAC members requires being judicious about the time commitment required to serve on the committee.

Six scheduled meetings: The committee will meet every-other-month: January, March, May, July, September, and November.

Unscheduled meetings: Because the CAC's advice may be needed at time-sensitive milestones that don't align with the set calendar, staff may request additional meetings in order to meet time-sensitive milestones. These meetings are optional and committee members will be provided at least a week's notice when possible.

Meeting day: By default, meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, in between the two monthly meetings of the Board of Managers – allowing input from the CAC to be relayed at the month's following meeting. The date may be adjusted to accommodate holidays or District events.

For discussion: Adjusting meeting time: Committee meetings currently run from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. This time slot ensures that meetings do not conflict with common daytime working hours, but can conflict with committee members' family and dinner time. Alternatives to consider:

- *Daytime (11 a.m. to 1 p.m.):* Hosting meetings during MCWD's business hours would complement the organization's workflow, but conflict with common daytime working hours.
- *End of day (4 to 6 p.m.):* Hosting meetings at the transition between daytime work hours and evenings would minimize the commitment of evening hours, but would require those working common daytime hours to leave work early.

Content Planning

Effective content planning will ensure the CAC is providing counsel on the most important MCWD initiatives, that staff members have sufficient notice to prepare their material, and that members begin each year with a sense of what they will be engaged in.

Annual content planning: Twice per year, the MCWD Engagement Planner will work with the MCWD Program Manager team to forecast the schedule of topics for the coming six months (three scheduled meetings), in coordination with the CAC Executive Team, Administrator and Board of Managers President

Recurring topics in January and July: Each year, the CAC's January meeting will focus on the year ahead for MCWD and the CAC; and the July meeting will focus on MCWD's budget and workplan. The MCWD

Administrator will lead these discussions.

Key initiative topics: Each of the remaining four meetings -- and any additionally-scheduled meetings -- will focus on a key MCWD initiative, led by the MCWD staff member(s) in charge of the initiative.

Changes to content plan: Recognizing the need for flexibility, it will be a mutual expectation that the schedule of topics may have to shift in response to changes in work schedule. In those instances, the MCWD staff member who was scheduled to present to the CAC will work with the Engagement Planner to adjust the topic schedule.

Prep Materials

District staff will continue to provide preparatory materials before each CAC meeting to ensure members have sufficient information on the topic to be discussed at the upcoming meeting.

Meeting materials: Staff will continue to prepare and distribute a brief memo, agenda, and previous meeting's minutes to the committee ahead of each meeting. The staff member who is presenting to the CAC will prepare the memo, with review from the Engagement Planner. The Engagement Planner will remain in charge of circulating the meeting packet.

Information flow between CAC and MCWD Board of Managers

Maintaining a steady two-way flow of information between the CAC and Board of Managers will ensure the value of the CAC's counsel is fully realized, and that committee members can remain apprised of key MCWD business.

Executive Team meetings: The Executive Team will continue to meet with MCWD staff ahead of each scheduled CAC meeting in order to ensure a steady flow of information between MCWD and staff. At the January and July Executive Team meetings, the MCWD Board President and Administrator will attend to review the upcoming content schedule. At the remaining scheduled meetings, the Engagement Planner and staff member who is leading the presentation will meet with the Executive Team to discuss the content and facilitation plan for the meeting.

Board presence at CAC: A member of the MCWD Board of Managers will continue to attend each scheduled CAC meeting as a liaison. Their primary role will be to observe and learn from the discussion, though they may be occasionally asked to provide their perspective.

Rotation of Board liaisons: At the beginning of each year, one Board member will be assigned to each of the six scheduled CAC meetings. Because there are seven Board members and six scheduled meetings, the Board President will not be assigned as a liaison. Instead, the Board President will remain in sync with the CAC via the Executive Team meetings held twice per year.

Board Agenda Packets: CAC members wishing to maintain a more detailed understanding of MCWD's work are encouraged to read the detailed agenda packets distributed ahead of each Board of Managers meeting. Committee members will continue to receive the Board packets via e-mail.

Membership and Recruitment

The committee structure must provide a venue for a variety of viewpoints to complement, enhance, and challenge each other, drawing on the membership's variety of perspectives – geographic, demographic, and professional.

Term length: CAC members will serve two-year terms -- long enough to ensure a term of service affords each member the opportunity to engage in a range of the District's work, but short enough to ensure a flow of fresh perspectives.

Staggered terms: Like MCWD managers, terms of CAC members will be staggered to ensure a degree of continuity on the committee. Thus, half of the committee's seats will be filled each year. Applications for seats with expiring terms will be accepted from October 1 to November 30 ahead of the appointing year, with appointments in January

Turnover: There are no term limits and existing members are encouraged to re-apply. To ensure potential new members have an opportunity to apply, each committee slot will be filled competitively and existing members will not be guaranteed a slot.

If a committee member leaves during their term, the slot will be filled during the next cycle.

Committee size: The committee will be twice the size of the Board of Managers: up to 14 members, large enough to ensure a variety of perspectives, but small enough to ensure each member is afforded the chance to routinely share.

Appointments: The Board of Managers will continue to decide which applicants to appoint to the CAC, as required by state statute. The Engagement Planner will continue to coordinate the application process.

Makeup of committee members: Because the committee's core value comes from its variety of perspectives, the Board's appointment decisions will consider how applicants contribute to the diversity of the committee along key dimensions:

- *Geographic:* The committee plays a key role in using local, on-the-ground knowledge to provide unique perspectives on MCWD's work. Thus, committee members should be dispersed throughout the watershed.
- *Demographic:* MCWD covers a large and culturally varied area within the Twin Cities, and its work serves many different types of people. Thus, committee members should be varied across ethnicity, gender, and age.
- *Professional:* Committee members draw heavily on their unique professional background to provide fresh ways of thinking about MCWD's work. Thus, committee members should come from a variety of professional backgrounds.

Recruitment and promotion: In order to appoint committee members who bring an optimal variety of perspectives along geographic, demographic, and professional lines, the Board of Managers must have a large and varied applicant pool to evaluate.

To create a larger and more varied applicant pool, calls for CAC applications will be broadcast more widely through MCWD's channels: media outlets, community groups, and partners. An accompanying "job description" will describe the activities and time commitment associated with serving on the CAC.

Summary of proposed changes

	Current	Proposed
Scope of work	Deep, sustained engagement with a single topic over many meetings	Vetting, stress testing, and brainstorming on the strategy and communication associated with a variety of key initiatives
Schedule		
Meeting frequency	Monthly	Bi-monthly, with option to call additional meetings as needed
Meeting date	First or third Wednesday of the month, as needed	Third Wednesday of the month, unless conflicting with holiday or MCWD event
Meeting time	6:30 to 8:30 p.m.	Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daytime: 11 to 1 p.m. • End of day: 4 to 6 p.m. • Evening: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Content planning	Determined quarterly	Determined every six months
Prep Materials	Memo ahead of meeting	No change
Information flow between Board and CAC		
Executive Team	16 meetings: Monthly ahead of each CAC meeting, plus quarterly with MCWD leadership (16 meetings)	6 meetings: Bi-monthly ahead of each scheduled CAC meeting, including twice with MCWD President and Administrator
Board presence at CAC	Individual board members assigned as formal liaisons	No change
Membership and Recruitment		
Term length	1 year	2 years, with staggered terms
Term limit	None	None
Re-appointment for existing members	By custom, interested members usually re-appointed automatically	Existing members encouraged to re-apply, but slots will be filled competitively
Committee size	Varies	Up to 14 members
Appointments	Decided by Board of Managers, coordinated by Engagement Planner	No change
Recruitment promotion	Limited announcement through MCWD channels, media, partners	Widespread announcement to media outlets, partners, and community groups
Appointment criteria	Undefined	Ensuring a variety of geographic, demographic, and professional backgrounds