



Wednesday, September 20, 2023

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
MCWD Office, Board Room
www.minnehahacreek.org

Board of Managers:

Sherry White, President; William Olson, Vice President; Jessica Loftus, Treasurer;
Eugene Maxwell, Secretary; Richard Miller, Manager; Arun Hejmadi, Manager; Steve Sando, Manager

Board Liaison: Manager Sando

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Present:

Marcy Bean, Emily Balogh, Lisa Fowler, Robert Glisky, Laurie Goldsmith, John Iverson, Suzanne Jiwani, Drew McGovern, David Oltmans, Cassy Ordway

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Denise Tennen, Richard Nyquist, Dan Flo,

MCWD Staff Present:

Samantha Maul, Kate Moran, Becky Christopher

6:37 pm

1. **Committee Meeting Call to Order and Roll Call**
Executive Officer John Iverson called the meeting to order.
2. **Approval of Agenda (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
2.1 September 20, 2023 agenda
Jiwani, Goldsmith. All approved.
3. **Approval of Minutes (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
3.1 July 19, 2023 minutes
Bean, Glisky. All approved.
4. **Action Items**
No action items.

6:45pm

5. **Discussion Items**
5.1 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Draft Framework – **Moran and Christopher**
Moran introduced MCWD’s approach to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Framework. Moran shared that the presentation would provide an overview of the purpose of DEI as it relates to MCWD’s mission, explain the staff workgroup process and findings, and open the topic for discussion.

MCWD’s approach to DEI is an extension of its Balanced Urban Ecology philosophy. To achieve its mission, the District pursues capital projects and policies that create environmental, social, and economic benefits for its communities. In the context of DEI, there are many barriers to achieving Balanced Urban Ecology in all our communities, such as existing disparities,



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varying levels of impacts and burdens, and exclusive planning processes. To address these challenges, MCWD seeks to understand the diversity of its member communities, identify disparities, promote equity, and create opportunities for meaningful inclusion.

To illustrate the impact and potential of an integrated planning framework for DEI, Moran shared examples from MCWD's recent work on the Minnehaha Creek Greenway. This corridor, adjacent to marginalized communities, was the most degraded stretch of Minnehaha Creek. Cottageville Park was a key project on the Greenway and was advanced through a partnership with the City of Hopkins. The park restoration included a new shelter, play area, underground stormwater treatment, and a community garden, among other features. Before the restoration of Cottageville Park, the surrounding area was a local hotspot for criminal activity. To ensure the project met the needs of the community, MCWD conducted a robust community engagement process. While this project was a good example of how MCWD can add value to communities, it was also a learning experience.

CAC members asked a question about how criminal activity was redistributed in the City of Hopkins and how affordable housing was impacted by the project's construction. Moran and Christopher responded that they were not primary staff members on this project and would have to check with the City to see how crime was redistributed. The project included the demolition of several units of naturally occurring affordable housing, but this was more than replaced with the Project for Pride in Living apartment complex that was built along the park because of MCWD's partnership. However, looking back, Moran and Christopher noted that this was a key area of learning for the District, and that MCWD will continue to explore affordable housing considerations as it evaluates future projects with its municipal partners. In addition to prioritizing the integration of DEI into its external project planning work, the District is considering how to implement DEI in its internal processes. The Board of Managers established the DEI planning effort, to support both internal and external processes, as a priority for the organization, and allocated funding in the budget for this work in 2023 and in 2024.

Moran asked CAC members to share their perspectives with the question: Why is DEI important to MCWD's work? CAC members reflected that it is critical for MCWD to think holistically about how its investments impact nearby communities. CAC members also asked about MCWD's commitment to incorporating DEI into its planning and internal processes. Moran and Christopher responded that DEI will be another lens and perspective for MCWD to evaluate project opportunities and internal processes. CAC members also noted the importance of working carefully with MCWD's partners on DEI efforts, since many are at different phases of implementation, especially related to issues of displacement and community services. One CAC member noted that MCWD's approach to DEI planning mirrors its approach to the Lake Nokomis White Paper Public Meeting. MCWD is positioning itself as a data-driven, solution-oriented leader in the face of complex challenges, while maintaining the organization's strategic direction. CAC members asked how the DEI plan would be used and how MCWD would be proactive about implementing this approach across the watershed. Moran shared that the DEI Framework is an internal guiding document, but MCWD will likely work with a consultant to develop a public-facing DEI plan, which will be integrated into MCWD's next watershed management plan.

Moran then presented on MCWD's DEI workgroup process and its findings. The workgroup focused on three major areas: (1) compiling resources to support a DEI resource library for staff learning, (2) scanning comparable organizations to understand their approaches and plans for incorporating DEI, and (3) researching consultants, RFPs, and scopes of work to inform how MCWD could work with an external agent to develop its DEI plan.

To support staff learning and build organizational capacity, the staff workgroup created a resource hub that includes a range of content and tools to inform staff's general understanding of DEI terms and concepts, interpersonal and group work, current beliefs, and developmental work, as well as organizations and systems.

The staff workgroup also reviewed 47 plans at the regional, state, and national level to understand the primary areas of focus and action steps that organizations had identified. Many of MCWD's cities have some form of a DEI plan, but agencies across the watershed are in different phases. MCWD developed a standardized matrix to document and compare agency content. CAC members asked about the nature of the plans that the workgroup identified. Moran and Maul explained that most of the plans were developed within the last decade, with a larger concentration in the region advanced shortly after George Floyd's murder. A small percentage of these plans were developed by consultants, but the majority were internally led.

MCWD researched 39 consultants around the country. These consultants primarily contributed to the areas of organization assessment, training, and strategic planning. MCWD also analyzed procurement information to better understand how consultants were scoped and budgeted.

Based on the workgroup's findings, staff developed several recommendations to inform the development of a DEI plan. MCWD organized its framework and plan recommendations into two clear areas: (1) internal people and processes, and (2) external, mission-driven work.

Within the internal people and processes work area, MCWD established goals of creating a culture of belonging, by providing training and policies that support equitable recruitment and retention. This area may include action steps such as broadening our recruitment channels, adopting a DEI statement, providing education and training, establishing policies to ensure equitable contractor procurement, and improving onboarding experiences, to name a few examples.

In relation to external, mission-driven work, MCWD will be focused on adopting a DEI policy statement and integrating an equity lens incorporate DEI into its projects and policy processes. Moran explained this concept by stepping through an example of a project area on the Minnehaha Parkway in Minneapolis. As a water resource organization, MCWD must understand social and community impacts not just around the projects or investments themselves, but also downstream. Also, since many of MCWD's resources are recreational amenities, MCWD and its partners prioritize an understanding of the visitors to these places, not just the residents that live in proximity. Moran explained that these efforts are still in early phases, but the case study along the Parkway illustrates how MCWD might consider implementing an equity lens.

Another external area of MCWD's DEI integration approach is outreach and engagement. MCWD seeks to provide inclusive and equitable processes for

engaging its communities. To provide inclusive experiences, MCWD may implement action steps such as creating an organizational engagement policy, developing an engagement toolkit, or crafting an approach for engaging tribal organizations, to name some examples.

MCWD's Board of Managers is supportive of the Draft DEI Framework, and anxious to move this work forward. Knowing that MCWD may lead some of this work internally and utilize a consultant for other elements, the District is planning to move forward on the following near-term actions: develop an inclusive onboarding experience for new hires, initiate DEI training for internal stakeholders, develop an equity planning lens, create a more consistent and inclusive engagement framework and accompanying tools, and revise human resource policies. MCWD will continue to refine the DEI Framework before its acceptance and develop a workplan to advance near-term action steps. The District seeks to implement the DEI Workplan in 2024, at which time it will also engage a consultant.

Moran presented a few questions for the CAC to discuss: Are the draft DEI Framework's areas of focus and potential actions clear? What is missing? What should staff consider as they work to finalize the DEI Framework and develop a scope of work for an external consultant? CAC members asked about how MCWD is considering staff trainings. Moran shared that MCWD is still in the early stages of developing that part of the plan, but shared that staff now have access to a resource hub which will bridge the gap before formal training is initiated. CAC members noted the importance of robust, engaging, and ongoing staff trainings. CAC members also reflected on MCWD's approach to engaging Indigenous communities. They shared that land acknowledgements have evolved into land, water, and air acknowledgements, and that there are many dynamics to consider when engaging Indigenous communities. The CAC noted the importance of meeting communities where they're at and engaging them directly to make sure the watershed's goals align with theirs.

CAC members also discussed the diversity of the CAC and the Board, noting that neither group is demographically representative of the watershed's constituency. Moran and Maul shared that diversity on MCWD's CAC is an established priority for the Board and reflected in the CAC application evaluation criteria. Christopher explained that MCWD's Board of Managers is appointed by Hennepin and Carver counties, so diversity in MCWD's Board must be prioritized by the counties. One CAC member shared about a recent presentation with the State Demographer, and suggested MCWD schedule a similar presentation. The CAC pointed out that there might be some blind spots in MCWD's DEI approach, and therefore emphasized the importance of engaging many perspectives in the DEI plan's development. In closing, CAC members commended staff for their approach, noting that the DEI Framework is thoughtful and intentional.

8:05pm

6. Informational Items + Updates

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- Maul shared that the 2024 CAC Recruitment process is underway. CAC members should have received an email with detailed instructions on the application process. CAC members serve two-year, staggered terms. Half the CAC must apply for formal re-appointment, and half the CAC will continue their term. All CAC members are encouraged to share the request for applicants through their networks to help recruit a CAC that is professionally, geographically, and demographically diverse.

- A CAC members shared that he'd recently participated in a carp removal effort with another watershed, during which staff cited MCWD's habitat restoration program as a model example of a holistic carp removal and restoration strategy.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- Manager Sando noted that MCWD's new website launched in August and urged CAC members to check out the new site and its features.
- Manager Sando shared that the Board of Managers adopted the 2024 Budget and Levy at the September 14th Board meeting, following a public hearing in August. The CAC reviewed the draft budget at the July CAC meeting and provided feedback on the Budget & Workplan publication.
- Manager Sando also noted that the Board adopted MCWD's 2024 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), after it was distributed to MCWD's communities for a 30-day review and comment process. Michael Hayman presented on MCWD's CIP at the May CAC meeting.

6.3 Staff Updates

- Maul shared that back in July, James Wisker and Manager Loftus provided an update on the 325 Blake Road project. Two months later, MCWD is still negotiating the purchase and sale agreement of the site with the developer, Alatus. However, the affordable housing building, now called CHORUS, is set to open for rentals in December. MCWD continues to advance projects in other parts of the watershed. The County Road 6 Pond Retrofit in Long Lake, the East Auburn Wetland Restoration, and the Cedar to Greenway Regional Trail Connection, each recently completed feasibility and will be starting design soon. MCWD is also making progress with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) and the City of Minneapolis, on the feasibility of three projects along the Minnehaha Parkway.
- Maul explained that MCWD is conducting a Stormwater Pond Maintenance project to ensure the continued performance of two stormwater ponds in Minneapolis: Twin Lakes Park Pond, and Amelia Pond. MCWD is contracting with an engineer to design maintenance activities, which will likely include dredging.
- Maul noted that MCWD has reached a key milestone in its climate action planning process. Staff completed the pilot model process for the 2-D watershed-wide model and selected a platform for the full model build. MCWD will start the build this fall, but before making that next step, MCWD is hosting a briefing for its communities to learn more about the Climate Action Framework and the 2-D model.
- Maul expressed that the watershed remains in severe drought. The lake level on September 20th was 927.8 ft. The dam will remain closed until the lake level rises above 928.6 ft. Maul shared that there is some rain forecasted over the weekend, but likely not enough to address the watershed's severe water deficit. Maul noted that CAC members and residents can turn to the website's new features for data and resources on water levels.

8:28pm

7. **Adjournment**

Oltmans, Goldsmith. All approved.

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, November 15, 2023, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Hejmadi, Board Liaison)