



**MINNEHAHA CREEK**  
WATERSHED DISTRICT

## **MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT LAND & WATER PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE**

*Outcomes from a collaborative stakeholder engagement process*

# BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN LAND AND WATER PLANNING

## A Vision of Balanced Urban Ecology

At the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD or District), we believe that when built and natural systems exist in harmony, they can provide lasting economic, social, and environmental benefits. This philosophy was the foundation for our 2017 Watershed Management Plan, which framed our strategy of building partnerships to integrate land use and water planning and create mutual benefits.

## Creating Shared Benefits

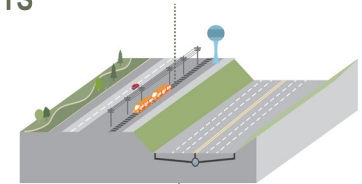
We can best achieve our mission of protecting water resources when we work collaboratively with partners to add value to their projects, and we know that the largest return on investment is realized when we're engaged at the earliest stage of a project, to identify partnership opportunities, provide technical support, and anticipate regulatory needs, ultimately saving partners time and money.

### BUILDING SYSTEMS FOR INTEGRATED PLANNING

Over the past year, MCWD conducted an engagement process, convening a technical advisory committee (TAC) to provide feedback on our Land & Water Partnership program, refine improvements to MCWD's permitting program, and build systems to promote continued collaboration and integrated planning. The TAC included representatives from cities, counties, soil and water conservation districts, and park agencies in the watershed.

### ALIGNING PLANS & INVESTMENTS

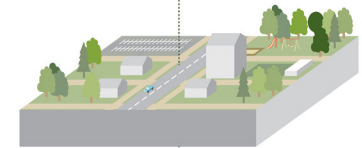
Roads + Infrastructure



Parks + Open Space



Community Development



Natural Resources



*I like the effort the District is putting in to think about process improvements and how to better work with communities and private partners.*

*- TAC Member Survey Response*

# CREATING SYSTEMS TOGETHER

Over the course of eight meetings, the TAC provided critical input to refine MCWD's programs to best support the goals of our communities. A summary of feedback and next steps is included on the following pages for each of the Land & Water Partnership Initiative's work areas, summarized below:



## Launching the Land and Water Partnership Program | Page 4

We're launching a new program to provide technical and financial support to projects that provide significant, regional water resource improvements. This program allows us to understand local priorities through early coordination and work together to advance mutual interests and produce broader community benefits.



## Optimizing the Permitting Experience | Page 6

Our permitting team interacts with key partners on a regular basis. We're working to optimize the program by improving customer service, promoting early engagement, partnering to reduce redundancy, and revising our permitting rules to simplify and improve clarity. These improvements will save applicants time and money, while ensuring our resources remain protected.



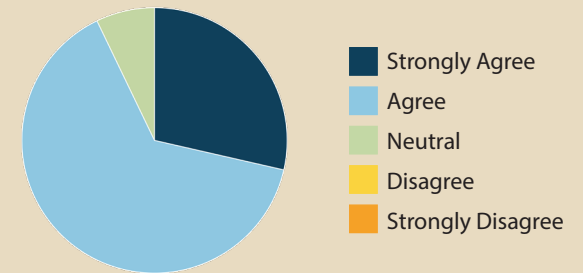
## Building Relationships for On-Going Collaboration | Page 8

Together, we can work to build new bridges and identify channels to coordinate our efforts to integrate land and water planning. By improving communication and information sharing, we can identify and enhance opportunities for partnership.

## RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

We know that open communication and strong relationships are critical ingredients for transformative partnerships, and so do our partners. In a post TAC survey, members expressed that our engagement process strengthened **relationships** and increased **trust** in the District as a partner. Results from the survey are included to illustrate the outcomes of the Land & Water Partnership Initiative.

*MCWD's process increased my trust in the organization.*



MCWD thanks TAC members for their contributions as we worked to build relationships and refine our programs. A list of those who participated in the Initiative is included on page 11.



# LAUNCHING THE LAND & WATER PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Land & Water Partnership (LWP) program was designed with our partners, for our partners. As designed, the program will support partner-led projects that advance community goals and provide significant, regional water resource benefits.

Throughout the watershed, land use changes create windows of opportunity for water resource improvements. The LWP program is intended to identify these opportunities through early coordination and support collaborative projects by providing technical and financial assistance, integrating qualifying projects into MCWD's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

## TAC Input: Building Shared Value Together

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, TAC members expressed support for the program's purpose and provided recommendations to clarify its process and guidance documents.

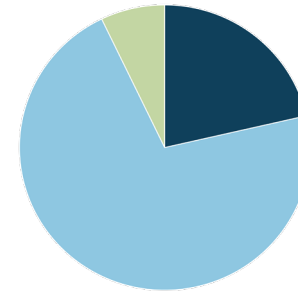
The TAC's review and input helped ensure that the new LWP program:

- ➔ Promotes early coordination to explore potential project opportunities
- ➔ Serves a variety of communities with different needs and resources
- ➔ Utilizes a transparent evaluation and decision-making process
- ➔ Aligns well with the capital improvement planning and budget processes of public partners

## Next Steps: Launching the Program

We're excited to begin providing support to eligible projects in 2024! We invite public and private partners to reach out to discuss emerging project ideas so we can explore partnership opportunities together.

*The LWP Program provides valuable support for public projects.*



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



Learn more and stay up to date on our new website:  
[minnehahacreek.org/partnerships/land-water-partnership-program](https://minnehahacreek.org/partnerships/land-water-partnership-program)

# BRINGING INNOVATIVE PROJECTS TO LIFE

To inform the LWP program design, MCWD has been operating the program in a pilot phase and has already provided technical and financial support to several partner projects that deliver benefits to the region's water resources and communities.

## Regional Treatment in the City of Deephaven

In 2022, the City of Deephaven reached out to MCWD with interest in taking a proactive approach to identify opportunities for potential partnership by integrating regional water resource improvements into planned infrastructure projects in the community.

## An Integrated Approach

The City recognized the importance of early engagement, which enabled MCWD and the City to align goals and work collaboratively to identify opportunities for improvement. MCWD provided technical support to evaluate project costs and benefits and helped the City secure grant funding from Hennepin County for a prioritized project that will improve water quality in Lake Minnetonka.



*MCWD staff have been great to work with. Partnering with MCWD has allowed us to identify the most cost-effective opportunities for water resource improvement and secure outside funding for implementation.*

**- Kent Carlson, Mayor of Deephaven**



# OPTIMIZING THE PERMITTING EXPERIENCE

As one of the key ways MCWD engages with the land use community, our permitting program provides opportunities for MCWD to work with applicants to explore mutually beneficial partnerships that save applicants time and money.

To promote this partnership approach, we're conducting a series of improvements to the permitting program to:

- ➔ Streamline the application and review process to be more efficient
- ➔ Simplify and clarify our rules to be more user-friendly
- ➔ Align our standards with those of other agencies for greater consistency
- ➔ Partner to reduce redundancy in permit review, inspection, and enforcement
- ➔ Promote early coordination to navigate challenges and identify opportunities

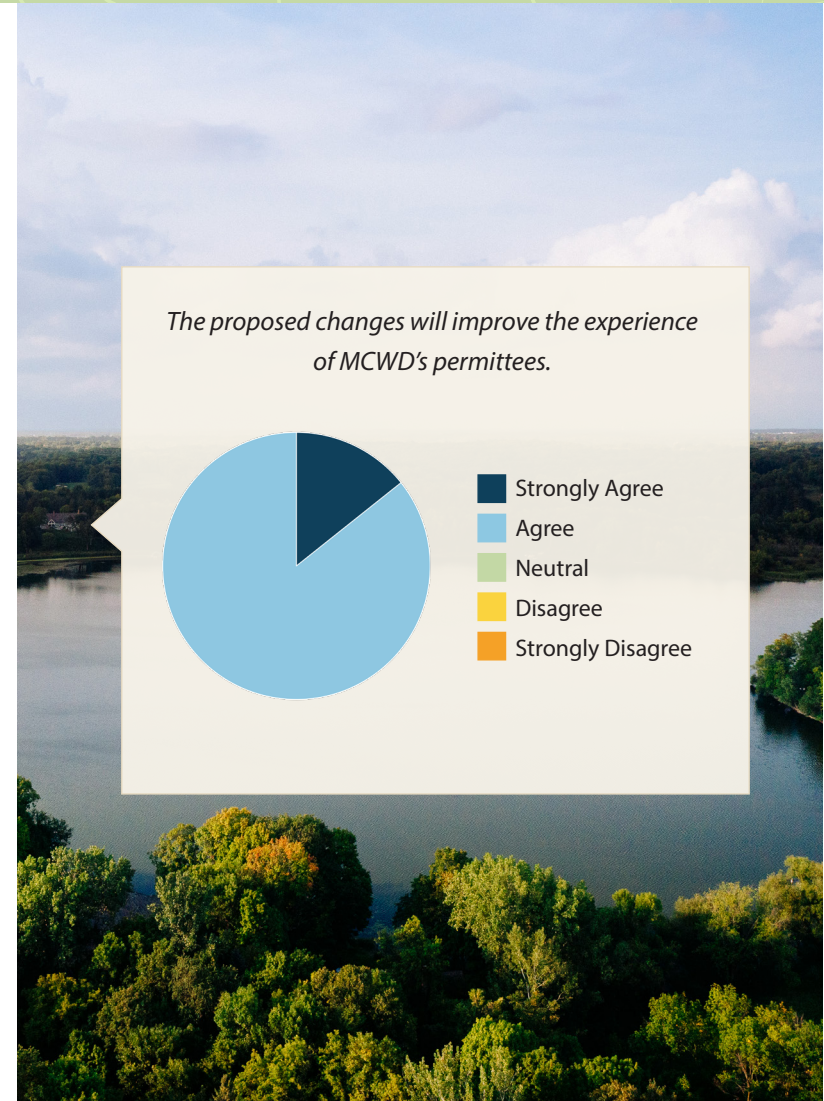
## TAC Input: Streamlining Our Process Together

TAC members expressed strong support for the proposed improvements to our permitting program and provided input to revise our rules. The TAC also identified opportunities to further streamline permitting for low-risk projects and shared ideas to improve coordination and data sharing between MCWD and municipal regulatory programs.

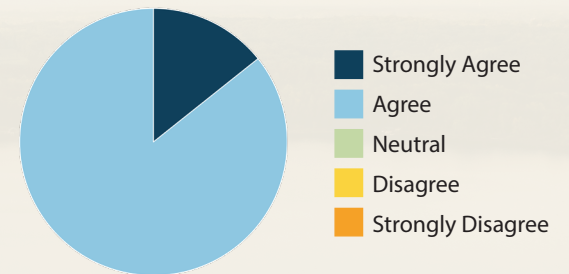
## Next Steps: Adopting Revised Rules

Now that the engagement process has concluded, we're finalizing our rules with input from the TAC. Interested stakeholders will be invited to provide feedback on the rules during the public comment period this winter, before the rules are adopted in early 2024.

Stay up to date on our website at: [minnehahacreek.org/permits/](https://minnehahacreek.org/permits/)



*The proposed changes will improve the experience of MCWD's permittees.*



*The TAC Process was a great example of co-creation between MCWD and its cities.*

*- TAC Member Survey Response*

# EXPLORING PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH EARLY COORDINATION

## A Wetland Banking Opportunity in Medina

Since 2018, MCWD has worked with the Cities of Long Lake, Medina, and Orono, and the Long Lake Waters Association, to develop the Long Lake Creek Roadmap, which lays out recommended project opportunities to provide water resource improvements in the Long Lake Creek subwatershed.

In 2022, staff at the City of Medina reached out to MCWD to discuss a proposed development located on a parcel identified within the Long Lake Creek Roadmap as a wetland restoration opportunity.

By coordinating early, MCWD, the City of Medina, and the private landowners were able to collaborate on a concept plan for the subdivision that incorporates a 19-acre wetland restoration. Given the high demand for wetland bank credits in the watershed, the restoration is estimated to generate between \$1.4 and \$2.1 million in additional revenue for the landowners, while ensuring that credits are available to offset wetland impacts elsewhere in the watershed.

## Making an Impact

The wetland restoration is estimated to provide the following environmental benefits:

- 19 acres of wetland and upland buffer restoration
- Up to a 24% reduction in runoff volume
- Up to a 9 lb. reduction in total phosphorus to impaired Holy Name Lake
- Improved vegetative quality, wildlife habitat, and other ecological benefits

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*MCWD's early involvement helped kick-start the wetland restoration process, develop the concept and show that it could become a reality. MCWD's technical assistance was critical in navigating regulatory challenges with the wetland banking process. This approach to private developments can be a model for how to collaborate to identify opportunities to exceed regulatory requirements and create a desirable project.*

**- Dusty Finke, City of Medina Planning Director**





# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR ONGOING COORDINATION

**Over the years, we've learned that strong relationships and early coordination are essential to advancing high-impact projects that provide valuable community benefits.**

With our partners, we are working to create new systems and processes that promote coordination, improve integration between land and water planning, and build lasting connections between agencies to enhance the watershed's resources.

## TAC Input: A Framework for Collaboration

The TAC suggested many ideas for strengthening relationships and coordination. Throughout the engagement process, we heard that our cities and other partners:

- ➔ Value regular staff coordination meetings to maintain relationships and identify partnerships
- ➔ Appreciate newsletters and presentations to keep policymakers informed
- ➔ Are willing to engage MCWD early in public project planning and private development review
- ➔ Want to collaborate to identify opportunities for regional stormwater management so they can be incorporated into city plans



## Next Steps: Working Together To Form Partnerships

We're asking cities and other public partners to engage with us early, during the concept stage, so we can work together to identify opportunities for partnerships on both public and private projects. With the relationships built through the TAC engagement process, we're already seeing this type of coordination come to life in exciting ways.



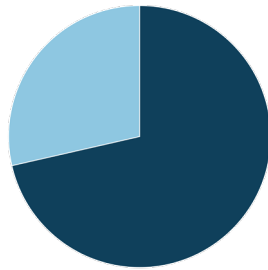
# A COMMITMENT TO EARLY ENGAGEMENT

## Creating Meaningful Connections

MCWD and its partners recognize that trust is essential for building partnerships and is cultivated through ongoing positive experiences. MCWD is committed to improving its processes to continue building trust and delivering high-quality services to its partners and communities.

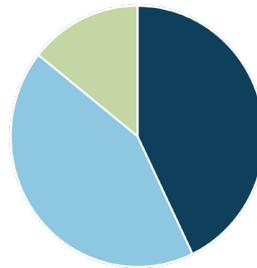
TAC members indicated support for, and a commitment to, early coordination with MCWD on both public projects and private development review, acknowledging that coordination must be reciprocal. This mutual commitment is essential to building effective partnerships that deliver significant, lasting results.

*I see value in engaging MCWD early in the planning process for public projects.*



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

*I see value in engaging MCWD early in private development review.*



*I appreciate the District's commitment to partnership and have seen them demonstrate this approach first-hand. The improvements MCWD is making will continue to build trust and strengthen relationships between MCWD and its communities.*

**- Cara Geheren, City of Victoria Engineer**



# A COLLABORATIVE PLAN FOR RESILIENCE

As MCWD closes the Land & Water Partnership Initiative, we're preparing to launch our next engagement process, which will be focused on coordinating climate action planning efforts across the region.

## A Data-Driven Understanding

Recognizing that changing precipitation patterns are impacting our built and natural systems, in 2022, MCWD adopted a Climate Action Framework (CAF), to serve as a roadmap for building resilience across the watershed.

MCWD is advancing its understanding of how changing climate patterns will impact communities by building a high-resolution, 2-D model of the watershed. This new model will leverage land surface and infrastructure data to provide a detailed understanding of surface and groundwater flows in the watershed. In September 2023, representatives from the watershed's communities were invited to a briefing to learn more about MCWD's CAF and its 2-D Watershed Model.

## Planning for Our Future

We're looking forward to collaborating with our communities to develop a strategy for adapting to the impacts of climate change with a foundation built in sound science. Starting in 2024, MCWD will initiate a stakeholder engagement process to convene technical experts, policymakers, and communities for climate action planning and the development of our next Watershed Management Plan.



© Erdahl Aerial Photos, 2014



Read the Climate Action Framework on our website: [minnehahacreek.org/our-approach/climate-action-framework/](https://minnehahacreek.org/our-approach/climate-action-framework/)

# A TEAM OF TRUSTED ADVISORS

The MCWD Board of Managers formally recognized all TAC members for their contributions to the Land & Water Partnership Initiative in a [Resolution of Recognition](#) on July 13, 2023.

## TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**City of Edina:** Jessica Vanderwerff Wilson; Alternate: Ross Bintner

**City of Hopkins:** Ryan Krzos

**City of Maple Plain:** Dylan Hoflock

**City of Medina:** Dusty Finke

**City of Minneapolis:** Elizabeth Stout; Alternate: Shahram Missaghi

**City of Minnetonka:** Sarah Schweiger; Alternate: Leslie Yetka

**City of Orono:** Melanie Curtis; Alternate: Laura Oakden

**City of Plymouth:** Chris LaBounty; Alternate: Ben Scharenbroich

**City of Richfield:** Mattias Oddsson; Alternate: Chad Donnelly

**City of St. Louis Park:** Erick Francis; Alternates: Phil Elkin, Mike Bahe

**City of Victoria:** Cara Geheren

**City of Wayzata:** Mike Kelly; Alternate: Emily Goellner

**Hennepin County:** Drew McGovern; Alternates: Karen Galles, Kris Guentzel

**Metropolitan Council:** Jen Kostrzewski

**Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board:** Madeline Hudek; Alternate: Adam Arvidson

**Three Rivers Park District:** Jami Markle; Alternate: Kelly Grissman

**Carver County Soil & Water Conservation District:** Mike Wanous  
**Bolton and Menk**, representing Greenwood, Mound, Orono, St. Bonifacius, Shorewood, and Woodland: Bob Bean

**WSB**, representing Deephaven, Excelsior, Minnetrista, and Tonka Bay: Rebecca Haug





**MINNEHAHA CREEK**  
WATERSHED DISTRICT

## REACH OUT FOR MORE INFORMATION

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[minnehahacreek.org/partnerships/](https://minnehahacreek.org/partnerships/)