



Title: 2027 Watershed Management Plan Scoping

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Purpose:

At the November 13, 2024, Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting, staff will review the proposed framework for the 2027 Watershed Management Plan (Plan) update, including its strategic framing, primary focus, areas of work, and engagement needs.

Background:

The current Plan was approved by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) on December 20, 2017 and is due for revision ten years from that date, giving the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD or District) a deadline of December 20, 2027. The MCWD Plan serves four primary purposes:

- Sets overarching thematic direction for that plan cycle;
- Aligns MCWD and cities around priority policy areas;
- Facilitates communication of MCWD's purpose and priorities to stakeholders; and
- Fulfills regulatory requirements that provide organizational transparency and accountability.

The [2017 Plan](#) reflected a significant shift in the District's approach to watershed management, centered around the Balanced Urban Ecology (BUE) policy. This philosophy prioritizes partnership with the land use community to integrate policy, planning, and implementation to leverage the value created when built and natural systems work together. By integrating its work with land use change -- such as economic development, infrastructure, and parks and open space -- MCWD not only achieves its environmental goals, but also broader social and economic objectives, thereby delivering maximum value to the taxpayer.

This approach of partnership and integrated planning has received strong support from the District's communities and other stakeholders, and has led to the successful implementation of several high-impact projects. It is staff's intent that the 2027 Plan will carry forward the direction set in the 2017 Plan, including the BUE philosophy, goals, and implementation model, while building out several key areas.

The primary area of focus for the 2027 Plan update, as has been identified by the Board through its strategic planning discussions, will be climate adaptation and the development of a regional framework for flood management. The District recognizes that climate change is already impacting the state and its water resources, and the effects of climate change are expected to accelerate in the coming decades. In order for the District to continue to work toward its BUE vision, it must develop a strategy to ensure that the watershed remains as resilient as possible. The Board adopted its [Climate Action Framework](#) (CAF) in December 2022, which outlines MCWD's approach to enhance its understanding of vulnerabilities across the watershed and collaborate with partners to develop shared goals and a coordinated management strategy to be memorialized in the 2027 Plan.

Summary:

Attached is a draft framework for the 2027 Plan update, which has been informed by Board and staff input. This document outlines the organizational strategic framework, the primary focus of the 2027 Plan, and the scope of work across four major topic areas, including the objectives, outputs, and engagement needs for each area.

At the November 13, 2024, CAC meeting, staff will provide an overview of the draft 2027 Plan Framework and will ask the CAC to provide feedback on the proposed scope of work, including discussion of audiences and engagement methods. The CAC will help vet the 2027 Plan Framework and inform the development of a stakeholder engagement plan which will then be brought back for Board review and adoption. Following this milestone, the District will initiate stakeholder engagement starting in early 2025.

To continue to stress-test and refine the scope of work for the 2027 Plan, the CAC is asked to review the attached draft framework and consider the following questions:

- What changes could be made to improve the clarity of what we're trying to accomplish and why?
- What information is most important for the public to know about the Plan update? What topics would they be most interested in?
- Given the scope of the Plan update, where do you think the CAC's input would be most valuable?
- What challenges and opportunities do you anticipate as part of this process?

Attachments:

- Draft 2027 Watershed Management Plan Framework

2027 Watershed Management Plan Framework

October 2024 Draft

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Organizational Strategic Framework

The 2027 Watershed Management Plan (Plan) will carry forward and build on the strategic direction set in the 2017 Plan, as summarized below.

Vision

A landscape of vibrant communities where the balance of natural and built environments create value and enjoyment.

Mission

To collaborate with public and private partners to protect and improve land and water for future generations.

Goals

Water Quality - To preserve and improve the quality of surface and groundwater.

Water Quantity - To manage the volume and flow of stormwater runoff to minimize the impacts of land use change on surface and groundwater.

Ecological Integrity - To restore, maintain, and improve the health of ecological systems.

Thriving Communities - To promote and enhance the value of water resources in creating successful, sustainable communities.

Strategic Focus

Projects – Building high-impact projects that measurably benefit the watershed.

Policy – Developing policy at the intersection of land and water planning to foster partnership and influence development's impact on the watershed.

2027 Plan Focus

What – An Integrated Flood Management Strategy

The primary focus of the 2027 Plan will be on the collaborative development of a watershed-wide flood management strategy to increase resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Why – The Challenge

- Minnehaha Creek watershed's history of flooding
 - MCWD was petitioned into existence in 1966 for the purpose of flood control.
 - Extreme rain events in 1987 and 2014 again created major flooding problems for local communities, impacting property and infrastructure.
 - Flooding events will always be a threat and strategic opportunity for MCWD to provide value at the nexus of land use and water management.
- Land use change
 - Land use decisions are a primary driver of watershed health, impacting the quantity and quality of runoff.
 - Historic land use decisions have resulted in significant loss of water storage and a flashy system that can lead to both flooding and drought.
 - Conveyance is a common solution to localized flooding, but conveyance alone transfers risk downstream and can contribute to negative cumulative impacts.
- Climate change
 - Climate change is exacerbating the impacts of these flashy systems with more extreme changes in precipitation, leading to increased risk of flooding and drought.
 - The watershed has experienced both extremes during the last plan cycle and seen significant regional flooding impacts to both the natural and built environment.
 - The region is projected to continue to become warmer and wetter, with warmer winters, wetter springs with heavier rain events, as well as increased summer heat and the potential for more intense droughts.

How - Guiding Principles

- Data-Driven Decision Making – MCWD relies on scientific data and analyses as the foundation for wise decisions.
- Partnership and Integrated Planning - Because land use drives water resource issues, MCWD can be most effective by working in partnership with those making land use decisions to align goals, plans, and investments for shared benefit.
- Maximizing Regional Benefit – MCWD will maximize its impact by planning on a watershed scale and focusing on solutions that provide the greatest regional benefit.

Scope of Work

Areas of Work

Four primary areas of work have been identified for the 2027 Plan update:

1. Integrated Flood Management Strategy – The primary focus for stakeholder engagement and policy development will be the development of an integrated flood management strategy to reduce flood risk and increase resilience to climate change. The District will apply its data-driven approach of understanding the issues and drivers of flooding, and convening our partners to develop shared goals, policies, and management strategies to improve resilience to climate change and reduce flood risk across the watershed.
2. Focal Geographies – The Plan will carry forward the District’s proven implementation model of focusing in areas of high need and opportunity to achieve significant regional benefit. This will involve identifying focal geographies for the next plan cycle and developing implementation plans in collaboration with local partners. The process will also integrate flood management strategies and priorities into the subwatershed plans.
3. Land & Water Partnership (LWP) Program – The Plan will also carry forward the District’s complementary implementation model of responding to needs and opportunities across the watershed through the LWP program. To continue building out this new program, this work will focus on the identification of regional opportunity areas and coordination improvements to support more targeted and proactive opportunity identification with partners.
4. Evaluation Framework - As a data-driven organization it is important that we continually evaluate our effectiveness in achieving our four strategic goals of improving water quality, water quantity, ecological integrity, and thriving communities. This work will involve the development of clear metrics, tracking systems, and evaluation and reporting frameworks that can be consistently applied and integrated into existing planning processes.

The next four pages describe each of the work areas in greater detail, including the following:

- Objectives – Descriptions of what MCWD aims to achieve through the planning and stakeholder engagement process.
- Outputs - Desired outputs or deliverables for 2027. This does not include longer-term outputs to be achieved during the 2027 plan cycle.
- Engagement Needs - General characterization of what engagement will look like for each work area. Additional details will be provided at the November PPC.

Scope – Integrated Flood Management Strategy

Objectives

- Build shared understanding of the range of potential flood impacts to the watershed and our communities from climate change
- Utilize MCWD’s data-driven approach to work with communities to evaluate and prioritize flood management strategies within the watershed
- Collaborate with communities to determine MCWD’s role in managing volume and conveyance across municipal boundaries
- Engage public partners to shape policy direction, identify priority areas, and develop a shared implementation framework

Outputs

- Assessment of current and future flood risk, informed by the 2D model
- Shared flood management goals with communities across the watershed
- Consensus on the prioritization and appropriate application of various flood management strategies
- An implementation framework, including policies, strategies, priority areas, roles, and potential funding sources
- Broad support for MCWD’s engagement process and resulting flood management strategy

Engagement Needs

- Primary focus for TAC and PAC engagement, involving the following phases:
 - Discovery - Understand partners’ goals for the process; identify existing flood impacts
 - Direction Setting - Identify management goals; identify strategies and their potential application and tradeoffs
 - Data Analysis - Use 2D model to identify current and future flood risk and evaluate strategies
 - Decisions - Develop policies and implementation framework
- CAC involvement will include:
 - Upfront vetting of messaging and approach
 - Informed of progress and outcomes of TAC and PAC process
- General public:
 - Informed of process and outcomes via website, email updates, and public meetings

Scope - Focal Geographies

Objectives

- Maintain MCWD's approach of focusing in areas of high need and opportunity to achieve significant regional benefits
- Evaluate and identify focal geographies for the next decade based on a data-driven approach
- Identify the water resource issues, drivers, and appropriate management strategies for each focal geography
- Engage key stakeholders and partners within selected areas to understand land use plans and priorities to develop integrated project solutions
- Incorporate flood adaptation strategies, opportunities, and priorities from the broader flood management planning effort
- Build and maintain coalitions of partners for each focal geography

Outputs

- Clear justification for the selected focal geographies
- Updated/new focal geography implementation plans, including:
 - Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay – Updated subwatershed plan based on progress under 2017 Plan
 - Minnehaha Creek – Updated plan for Greenway and new management unit plans for Minneapolis
 - Painter Creek – Updated plan with more detailed issues, drivers, strategies, and priority projects based on diagnostic work
 - Long Lake Creek – Integration of existing Long Lake Creek Roadmap
- Broad partner support for each focal subwatershed plan

Engagement Needs

- Vetting of focal geographies with TAC, PAC, and CAC
- Engagement of local partners in diagnostic work and development of subwatershed plans:
 - Minnehaha Creek – Continue engagement of Minneapolis and MPRB technical staff and policymakers as outlined in the cooperative agreement
 - Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay – Reconvene the SMCHB Planning Partnership to update and vet the subwatershed plan
 - Painter Creek - Develop and implement an engagement strategy for the Painter Creek-Jennings Bay Roadmap
 - Long Lake Creek – Engagement of staff and policymakers to maintain support and advance implementation of the Long Lake Creek Roadmap

Scope - Land & Water Partnership (LWP) Program

Objectives

- Support implementation of high-impact LWP projects through the identification of regional opportunity areas
- Build on MCWD's data-driven approach by collecting data on partner plans and priorities to proactively identify project opportunities that align MCWD and partner goals
- Leverage the LWP program to support incorporation of MCWD's integrated flood management strategies into partner-led projects
- Identify opportunities to integrate water resource management considerations earlier in land use planning processes
- Evaluate potential of stormwater and wetland banks as a management tool to meet MCWD goals

Outputs

- Integration of the LWP program goals and processes into the Plan
- Identification of regional opportunity areas to guide MCWD and our partners in identifying priority projects
- Tools to strengthen partner coordination, proactively screen for LWP opportunities, and integrate partner goals into regional opportunity assessment:
 - Interactive map to integrate partner priorities into regional opportunity areas
 - External map to communicate MCWD regional opportunity areas to support partners' screening of projects
 - Guidance for partner screening and utilization of tools
- Assessment of regional banking strategies (benefits, risks, approaches)
- Best practice recommendations to further integrate water resources into land use planning processes and documents

Engagement Needs

- Throughout the TAC/PAC process, committee members will:
 - Vet regional opportunity areas identified by MCWD and inform partner guidance for opportunity screening
 - Provide input to support assessment of regional banking strategies
 - Explore options for further integration of water and land use planning
- Subwatershed planning sessions:
 - TAC, PAC and other agency departments will vet and pilot interactive map

Scope - Evaluation Framework

Objectives

- Create an evaluation framework to support continuous improvement, informed by data-driven decision making
- Increase transparency and accountability, for both internal and external audiences
- Demonstrate effectiveness of MCWD's partnership approach
- Integrate data from MCWD's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work to support MCWD's goal to create Thriving Communities
- Streamline MCWD tracking and reporting of progress to support MCWD's strategic planning process, regulatory requirements, and communication of MCWD's successes

Outputs

- Defined metrics and systems for tracking progress under each of MCWD's four organizational strategic goals
- Adoption of an evaluation framework to ensure alignment between program resources, activities, and intended outcomes
- Evaluation of progress under the 2017 Plan
- Consistent system and cycle for ongoing evaluation and reporting, aligned with processes for developing 2-year work plans and 5-year strategic plans

Engagement Needs

- Primarily an internal process for MCWD staff and Board to define how the organization will measure success and evaluate progress
- CAC will vet the approach and outputs to stress test and provide outside perspectives
- TAC will provide input on development of objectives, metrics, and tracking methods for Thriving Communities goal through the committee process
- Utilize survey or other methods to gather input from partners and general public on MCWD's work to inform progress assessment