



Wednesday, March 20, 2024

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

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 Olson

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Present:

Emily Balogh, Marcy Bean, Cara Donovan, Robert Glisky, Laurie Goldsmith, John Iverson, Drew McGovern, Rich Nyquist, Suzanne Jiwani, Sheri Wallace

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Dan Flo, Lisa Fowler, Janet Schaefer, Denise Tennen

MCWD Staff Present:

Becky Christopher, Maia Irvin

6:35 pm

- 1. Committee Meeting Call to Order and Roll Call**
- 2. Approval of Agenda (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
2.1 March 20, 2024, agenda
Balogh, Glisky. All approved.
- 3. Approval of Minutes (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
3.1 January 17, 2024, minutes
Bean, Iverson. All approved.
- 4. Action Items**
No action items.

6:45 pm

- 5. Discussion Items**
5.1 Strategic Action Plan DRAFT – **Christopher**
Christopher introduced the agenda and purpose for the meeting. MCWD is seeking input on its draft five-year Strategic Action Plan (SAP) as MCWD staff refine the document over the coming weeks. Christopher provided CAC members with an overview of the SAP and explained that it guides the organization toward achieving its mission and vision:
 1. It maintains organizational direction by defining priorities;
 2. It allows the organization to adapt to change by providing adjustments midway through the 10-Year Watershed Management Plan;
 3. It promotes alignment across programs and between staff, Board Managers, and CAC members, so the organization remains working toward common objectives;

4. It facilitates continuous improvement in performance through clear goals, monitoring, and evaluation;
5. It facilitates communication by supporting clarity of purpose and priorities for internal and external stakeholders.

The SAP is a five-year plan, so it fits within MCWD's broader planning context.

- Strategic Organizational Framework
- 10-Year Watershed Management Plan
- Five-Year Strategic Action Plan
- Two-Year Workplan

Christopher noted this is the second time MCWD has developed an SAP. The previous strategic plan cycle was completed in 2017 and realigned the organization and its priorities, programs, and people around a vision of Balanced Urban Ecology. This planning cycle is concentrated on ensuring the organization is aligned on clarity and focus of priorities.

In preparation for this planning cycle, the MCWD Board of Managers and staff undertook the following process from 2021-2023:

1. Extracted insights and principles of success from MCWD's history to guide the future;
2. Conducted a status assessment of progress on strategic priorities since 2018;
3. Established a set of core values to support MCWD's culture;
4. Engaged in a series of workshops in 2023 to brainstorm areas of organizational focus and priority for the next five years

Christopher explained that based on this process, five areas of strategic focus were selected for the 2024 SAP. Areas of strategic focus:

1. Expand MCWD's portfolio of high-impact capital projects
2. Develop meaningful climate action policy for the watershed
3. Cultivate strategic partnerships and grow brand advocacy
4. Enhance data-driven decision making
5. Invest in people and organizational culture

The goal of the first area of strategic focus is to deliver projects that measurably enhance the watershed and enrich communities. The SAP details four focus areas for capital projects, based on MCWD's regional implementation approach, with goals and action steps for each geography. The four focus areas are:

- Minnehaha Creek – Lake Hiawatha
- Six Mile Creek – Halsted Bay
- Long Lake Creek – Tanager Bay
- Painter Creek – Jennings Bay

The second area of strategic focus involves engaging communities in creating evidenced-based flood management strategies. To guide this work, MCWD has created three climate action pillars – understand & predict, convene & plan, and implement, measure & adapt – to expand data analysis, develop a watershed-wide climate strategy, and coordinate actions for implementation.

The goal of the third area of strategic focus is to strengthen collaborative relationships with partners and bolster support for MCWD's mission. The SAP lists three key objectives to achieve this goal. The first is to increase awareness and

support of partners and the public for priority projects through partner coalitions. The second is to be widely regarded as a trusted source of facts and solutions for the community. And the third is to be viewed as a resource, partner, and leader within the land use planning community through positive permitting experiences.

The fourth area of strategic focus' goal is to use data to inform everyday decisions, shape outreach, and build trust. There are three action areas to achieve this: implement data collection & management systems, build a data-driven culture, and create tools for understanding the watershed to support high-quality decision making.

The goal of the final area of strategic focus is to strategically expand MCWD's team, nurture professional growth, and foster a culture of excellence. This will involve expanding organizational capacity, empowering individuals through learning and development opportunities, and creating a culture that inspires pride and excellence.

Christopher asked the group for initial thoughts or questions about the SAP. Manager Olson asked if the 2-D watershed model that MCWD is creating had been presented to the CAC and provided a brief overview of it. One CAC member expanded on Olson's comments and reiterated that this model will be helpful as the watershed continues to experience climate change through flood and drought. Olson used the upcoming East Auburn Wetland Restoration project as an example of how MCWD could use the model to improve a project and then improve water quality and quantity in an area. A CAC member said they liked that the model will be able to recalibrate itself and constantly learn. Another CAC member commented it could be difficult for other watersheds to utilize this technology at first because MCWD has already done a lot of work to prepare for its integration.

Christopher wrapped up the large group discussion on the 2-D model and split CAC members into three small groups to discuss the SAP and provide feedback. Small groups discussed the following questions for about 25 minutes.

- What goals or initiatives strike you as particularly important to MCWD's work over the next five years?
- What goals or initiatives do you feel are missing?
- What concerns, interests, or unknowns would you like to flag for the group?

Following small group discussion, Christopher convened everyone to share highlights and feedback from their discussions. The first group said they felt resident and community engagement was missing from the SAP. They said there are many capital projects and strategic partners listed, but an important piece is also engaging residents and the broader community. One CAC member noted the importance of communicating MCWD's successes to residents even if those successes didn't take place in that area of the watershed. A CAC member asked Christopher what MCWD's process is to adjust geographic area priorities and how MCWD explain shifts in geographic priorities to communities. Christopher responded that when there is a shift in geographic priorities, it's generally because of opportunities that come up. For example, the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed is not designated as a focal geography, but MCWD has become a partner in that area in recent years because the three cities in that subwatershed partnered together on clean water efforts and residents formed a subwatershed association. The CAC member reiterated the importance of communicating any changes to a strategic plan and the decisions behind them.

The second group said they thought the size and scope of capital projects outlined in the SAP was impressive compared to other watershed districts, so success stories should continue to be promoted. They had concerns about the maintenance of legacy projects amid MCWD expanding its project portfolio. Christopher responded that the responsibility for project maintenance is shared between municipalities and the watershed district. CAC members said they appreciated the explicit mention of professional growth opportunities for staff in the SAP. CAC members also noted that the treatment and mitigation of future pollutants and chloride may be missing from the plan's focus areas.

The third group said they agreed that investing in employees, growth, opportunities, and education is important because without employees, there's no organization. They noted the way to reduce turnover is to ensure all employees feel involved. The group also said cultivating a cohesive, educated, and bonded group of staff will be especially important as MCWD plans for climate action, since the solutions to climate change are largely unknown. CAC members noted that they thought DEI initiatives could be more clearly called out in the SAP. They also said something to think about is how MCWD is educating partners because that's what leads to strong, strategic partnerships. To build partner coalitions, people need to be aware of what MCWD is capable of as well as the watershed district in general, so staff should think about opportunities for exposure, such as case studies, conferences, third-party validation through community newsletters.

Christopher thanked all CAC members for their feedback and asked for any final comments or questions. One CAC member asked what MCWD will do with the SAP once it's finalized to ensure that it's useful for the organization. Christopher responded that there will be implementation tables along with the final version of the SAP as an accountability tool. She explained staff will use the objectives and key results in each area of strategic focus to track work and evaluate progress throughout each year.

Another CAC member asked if MCWD shares expected timelines and goals listed in the SAP with partners. Christopher answered that the SAP is generally seen as an internal document used as an accountability tool, but staff do have conversations about project and initiative timelines with partners. A CAC member noted that MCWD should consider utilizing interpretive features at project sites to draw people to the website to learn more about MCWD's work through things like QR codes.

Christopher thanked the CAC members again for their questions and discussion and provided a timeline for the SAP process. The plan will undergo staff refinement over the next few weeks before going back to the Board at a committee meeting in April. The Board is expected to adopt the SAP in May.

8:20 pm

6. Informational Items + Updates

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- A CAC member mentioned that a reporter from the Star Tribune was writing an article on some of MCWD's work with partners in Minneapolis, and they were recently interviewed by the reporter.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- Olson reiterated his comments from earlier in the meeting on the 2-D watershed model. He announced to the CAC that the Board of Managers recently approved the selection of a contractor for the model build.
- Olson also provided an update on the East Auburn Wetland Restoration Project. The Board formally ordered the project at a recent meeting. A few members of the public came to the meeting to ask questions and voice concerns, but the overall sentiment was generally positive. Following the meeting, an RFP for the project was released.

6.3 Staff Updates

- Irvin provided an update on MCWD's permitting rule revisions. MCWD accepted public comments on the proposed revisions over a period of 45 days, which closed on February 1, 2024. Additionally, a public hearing was held at the January 11, 2024, Board meeting; no members of the public attended the hearing. MCWD received comments from nine agencies, and staff is in the process of developing responses and final revisions to the rules. The revised rules will likely come before the Board for adoption in April.
- Irvin also updated the CAC on the Cottageville Park Stormwater Treatment Retrofit. The Cottageville Park Improvement Project was completed in 2016, however, investigations by the City of Hopkins and MCWD determined the installed filter system is not functioning as designed. This retrofit will improve access to the system for routine maintenance, address scouring and short-circuiting of the current filter media, and perform life-cycle replacement of the current iron-sand filter medium. MCWD will coordinate with the City to communicate construction and minimize disruptions to the public.
- Irvin also gave a brief overview of current water levels and drought conditions. As of the meeting, no precipitation had fallen since early February. The National Weather Service placed the watershed in the lowest category of their spring flood outlook report (less than 50% chance of flooding), and the watershed is currently in "Moderate Drought" conditions. Lake Minnetonka's water level was at 928.71 feet, and Minnehaha Creek was flowing low at about 4 CFS. Gray's Bay Dam remains closed, and staff will continue to monitor conditions for potential dam opening, which may be later than typical due to the existing drought conditions.
- Lastly, Irvin noted that the Spring 2024 CAC field trip will be held on May 2 at the Wassermann Lake Preserve and the Six Mile Marsh Prairie.

8:40 pm

7. Adjournment

Iverson. Jiwani. All approved.

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, May 15, 2024, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Miller, Board Liaison)