



Title: Minnehaha Creek Corridor Analysis

Prepared by: Name: Gabriel Sherman
Phone: 952-641-4510
gsherman@minnehahacreek.org

Purpose:

At the June 13, 2024 Operations and Programs Committee (OPC) meeting, staff will present the preliminary results of a land use analysis of the Minnehaha Creek corridor and introduce a framework for strategic land use planning and potential acquisition for discussion by the Board. Staff will also introduce the Opportunity Screening Tool, MCWD's in-house employee-facing GIS system, and demonstrate its utility in supporting these types of analyses.

Background:

In recent years, land acquisition by MCWD has been focused almost exclusively on supporting the implementation of capital projects. While MCWD is often able to construct projects on land owned by other entities, land purchases can be a tool for securing key properties where easements or other arrangements are not feasible. Within the Minnehaha Creek subwatershed, for example, the Minnehaha Creek Greenway includes projects built on partner-owned land, but a contiguous greenway and trail corridor would not have been possible without the purchase of several key parcels from private owners.

In addition to capital projects, however, MCWD has a strategic interest in simply preserving or making public certain lands for ecological and societal benefit. As with capital projects, MCWD may be able to work with public and private landowners to accomplish this, but fee simple ownership may be more efficient or necessary in some cases. With a limited budget for land purchases and constrained staff capacity to continuously monitor real estate listings and engage with potential sellers, a framework for evaluating and narrowing the scope of possible partnerships and acquisitions is needed, as are the technology and data for staff to identify and assess opportunities.

Summary:

Opportunity Screening

To make informed decisions about how best to preserve and protect land within the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District for the benefit of water, people, and wildlife, a nuanced understanding of current and anticipated land use and ownership is key. In response to a previous Board Manager request to analyze the Minnehaha Creek corridor for potential strategic land acquisitions, staff determined that MCWD lacked the high-quality data and in-house tools to fulfill this type of request. Prior to completing this analysis, therefore, MCWD Project Planning and GIS staff worked to build out a robust GIS system with MCWD-specific data layers that could be used to conduct both routine and one-time analyses. In addition to providing the foundation for an analysis of land use along the Minnehaha Creek corridor, these data layers and GIS portal are now used daily by staff across all departments to carry out a variety of routine work and special projects.

Minnehaha Creek Corridor Analysis

Using the GIS data layers assembled to build out the Opportunity Screening Tool, staff conducted a preliminary land use and ownership analysis of the Minnehaha Creek corridor to determine where future land partnership and acquisition efforts should be focused. The analysis included:

- **Ownership:** Public and private ownership of parcels adjacent to Minnehaha Creek
- **Land use:** Land use of parcels adjacent to Minnehaha Creek
- **Floodplain:** Overlap of floodplain and public/private ownership

- **Regional trail:** Existing and proposed regional trails intersecting with the Minnehaha Creek corridor
- **Water and wetlands:** Open water and wetlands within the Minnehaha Creek corridor.

The full preliminary results will be presented to the Board at the June 13, 2024 OPC meeting. Based on these findings, staff will lead a discussion around the Board's preferred approach to land partnerships and acquisitions in the Minnehaha Creek corridor, as well as what additional analyses would be helpful in formulating the approach. Staff envision this analysis and discussion as introductory and the first in a series that will ultimately inform MCWD's approach to the Minnehaha Creek corridor in the 2027 Watershed Management Plan, as well as policies regarding land preservation, acquisition, and public access in the corridor.