



Wednesday, May 15, 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 Maxwell

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Present:

Emily Balogh, Cara Donovan, Lisa Fowler, Robert Glisky, John Iverson, Suzanne Jiwani, Janet Schaefer, Denise Tennen

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Marcy Bean, Dan Flo, Laurie Goldsmith, Drew McGovern, Rich Nyquist, Sheri Wallace

MCWD Staff Present:

Michael Hayman, Maia Irvin, Samantha Maul, Kate Moran

6:35 pm

- 1. Committee Meeting Call to Order and Roll Call**
- 2. Approval of Agenda (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
2.1 May 15, 2024, agenda
Balogh, Jiwani. All Approved.
- 3. Approval of Minutes (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
3.1 March 20, 2024, minutes
Balogh, Schaefer. All Approved.
- 4. Action Items**
No action items

6:45 pm

- 5. Discussion Items**
5.1 MCWD Capital Improvement Plan – **Hayman**
MCWD Director of Project Planning, Michael Hayman, introduced MCWD’s 2025 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). As required by Minnesota statute, MCWD operates on a 10-year Watershed Management Plan (WMP) cycle and is currently operating under its 2017 WMP. The 2017 WMP created a framework to support MCWD’s Balanced Urban Ecology policy, which outlines the principles of partnership, focus, and flexibility. The BUE policy frames MCWD’s two-prong project implementation approach: (1) implementing capital projects in focal geographies, and (2) remaining responsive to support project opportunities across the watershed with the Land & Water Partnership Program. The focal geography approach outlines a repeatable, focused implementation model to prioritize projects at the watershed and subwatershed scale, by considering the water

resource issues, the drivers of those issues, and the strategies that can address them, to inform effective investments to address water resource concerns.

MCWD organizes its work into an annual CIP, which provides a framework to predict and prioritize capital projects and align resources to support execution. The annual CIP is critical for budgeting each year, and includes tables outlining project schedule, cost, and funding sources. MCWD updates these tables as project priorities shift over time. MCWD annually distributes the CIP for review and comment by its communities.

To complement the annual CIP, MCWD also creates a multi-year CIP that tracks project progress over time, since most projects span multiple years. Project implementation for the projects listed in the CIP is variable depending on the project. However, in general, each project goes through a planning phase (2-5 years), design phase (1-3 years), construction phase (1-3 years), and then moves into maintenance upon completion.

MCWD currently has four major areas of capital project planning and implementation. All these areas are connected to impaired waterbodies and are in various stages of data analysis, planning, and construction. The two primary focal geographies that MCWD has focused in since the adoption of the 2017 WMP are the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay (SMCHB) Subwatershed and the Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed. There are active and completed projects that have advanced with strong partnerships in both geographies. The two other major areas are the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed and the Painter Creek Subwatershed, which are up next for project implementation. The current CIP distributed projects between the SMCHB and Minnehaha Creek subwatersheds, with a couple of upcoming projects in the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed. MCWD chose each of the four geographies based on two data-informed, regional treatment strategies. MCWD's Upper watershed or Lake Minnetonka Strategy involves investing in the areas that drain into Lake Minnetonka to create regional water resource benefits, and MCWD's lower-watershed strategy includes focused implementation in the Minnehaha Creek subwatershed to address the most degraded stretches of Minnehaha Creek.

Using data, staff discovered most of the water quality issues in Lake Minnetonka were coming from the upstream tributaries in the surrounding subwatersheds (Long Lake Creek, Painter, and SMCHB). By focusing on regional treatment projects upstream of the lake, projects can have measurable impacts downstream in the fourteen communities on Lake Minnetonka.

Most of MCWD's work toward the Lake Minnetonka Strategy so far has been in the SMCHB subwatershed. Using the focused implementation model, MCWD broke the subwatershed into five management units (MUs) to create community partnerships and fund regional treatment, landscape, and in-lake projects to improve SMCHB's impaired waterbodies. MCWD has implemented several projects so far and is starting to see significant changes in the area's natural resources as a result. For example, last year was the first year Wassermann Lake had been below state impairment standards, and now it could be delisted in the near future. Going forward, MCWD will be focusing on the other impaired waterbodies in SMCHB: East Auburn, South Lundsten, Mud lakes and Halsted Bay. One SMCHB project currently underway is the East Auburn Wetland Restoration, which is moving into active design. Years of data collection and analysis showed a significant amount of phosphorus loading into the East Auburn

lake from the wetland between East Auburn and Wassermann lakes. MCWD will be restoring the wetland to address this phosphorus loading. In addition to the wetland restoration, MCWD is in the early planning stage for the Turbid-Lundsten Corridor Restoration and a Halsted Bay Alum Treatment Facility.

Outside of SMCHB, there are a variety of impaired waterbodies in the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed that drain into Tanager Lake and Lake Minnetonka. MCWD partnered with communities in this area to create the Long Lake Creek Implementation Roadmap, which is a document that breaks the subwatershed into five MUs to understand the area's issues, drivers, and strategies. The roadmap also lays out an implementation plan that prioritizes projects, starting with regional treatment and then working toward in-lake treatments. One of the projects in MCWD's CIP is the County Road 6 Pond Retrofit. Research & Monitoring performed diagnostics on the pond and recognized it is not performing as effectively as expected. The retrofit will improve the pond's performance and is moving into the design phase. There are currently two other project opportunities in this area that MCWD is considering along with its partners.

The final area of the Lake Minnetonka Strategy is the Painter Creek Subwatershed, which flows into the impaired Jennings Bay. MCWD is planning to implement the management unit approach in this subwatershed, starting with a diagnostic study in 2025, to find the subwatershed's issues and develop strong partnerships with the community.

MCWD's second project implementation strategy is the Minnehaha Creek Strategy, which focuses on impaired waterbodies in the lower watershed, including Minnehaha Creek and Lake Hiawatha. MCWD has two focal areas within this subwatershed: the Minnehaha Creek Greenway in St. Louis Park and Hopkins and the Minnehaha Parkway in Minneapolis.

The Greenway was the most degraded portion of Minnehaha Creek, but projects developed through innovative partnerships have resulted in significant improvements in water quality, flood storage, and habitat creation. Three remaining projects in the Greenway will serve as capstones to this decade-long program of investment: 325 Blake Road, Cottageville Park Phase 2, and the Greenway to Cedar Regional Trail Connection. MCWD is now taking this approach downstream to Minneapolis to develop projects on the Minnehaha Parkway. MCWD is partnering with the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) to implement projects in the Parkway; the three partners recently adopted a new cooperative agreement for this work. The first three projects lined up are taken from MPRB's Minnehaha Parkway Master Plan and would improve water quality and resilience in Lake Hiawatha and Minnehaha Creek. MCWD recently released a feasibility RFP for the three projects, which may move into the design phase in 2025. MCWD and its partners are also working on a long-range planning effort, which would break the city into management units and outline a project implementation strategy over the next three decades.

Hayman thanked the CAC for their time and asked for questions and discussion on the CIP projects. One CAC member noted that they were at a public meeting a few years ago for MPRB's Minnehaha Parkway Master Plan and were concerned, from a flood resilience perspective, about some of the projects outlined in the plan. The CAC member asked if MCWD could influence partners to ensure regulatory compliance. Hayman responded that the master plan is a vision and aspiration,

which is why MCWD worked with MPRB and the City to narrow the 30 projects in the plan down to a few that would be feasible, beneficial, and cost-effective. Another CAC member asked how much of Minneapolis is permeable. Hayman said that the difference in permeable area between Minneapolis and the upper watershed is quite stark. Minneapolis has more impermeable area than the upper watershed, which impacts runoff, water quality, and project opportunities. A CAC member asked about how MCWD determines strategies and projects for specific subwatersheds. Hayman answered that Research & Monitoring efforts inform strategy. MCWD uses data to determine the root causes of water quantity and quality issues and how those can be addressed. Another CAC member asked for clarification on the East Auburn Wetland Restoration project. Hayman answered that the project includes the use of a sheet-pile weir, which would restore the wetland's natural hydrology.

Maul split CAC members into pairs, and they discussed questions regarding how MCWD should engage the public as the County Road 6 Pond Retrofit and East Auburn Wetland Restoration projects move forward into design. CAC members said MCWD should consider how the wetland restoration project will impact the property owners in the area and noted site interpretation and signage could provide the public with simple education about the wetland and the project. Two other CAC members noted that MCWD will have to think about how to communicate trail closures with residents who use the boardwalk that runs through the East Auburn Wetland. CAC members noted that MCWD should coordinate communications with the cities in each project area, as well as utilize local papers. They also advised that MCWD should prepare for public concern around the wetland restoration project if it could unintentionally create new nutrient export due to anaerobic conditions. CAC members noted that residents may also be concerned about the health of the wetland if they see construction vehicles disturbing the ecosystem, so MCWD should proactively communicate the project's scope, benefits, timeline, and disturbances to the wetland and community.

For the County Road 6 project, CAC members shared that the road can be busy, so MCWD should consider communicating construction details to a broader audience. Finally, they noted that one challenge with this project might be that many people will not notice it is happening, so there could be an opportunity to increase communication on the benefits of the project.

CAC members also suggested MCWD share a maintenance schedule for both projects, leverage existing community meetings, coordinate closely with the cities on public engagement, and ensure the public has opportunities to provide input prior to construction. The CAC re-enforced that outreach should go beyond public engagement and seek to build community understanding of the District's work.

5.2 Land & Water Partnership Program Update – **Moran**

MCWD Policy Planning Coordinator, Kate Moran, provided the CAC with an update on MCWD's Land & Water Partnership (LWP) program. Moran explained that the LWP program is a complement to the focal geography approach for capital projects, as a responsive program focused on partner-led projects.

MCWD ran a multi-year process with the CAC, Board of Managers, staff, and a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to provide feedback on the LWP program. The Board adopted the program in November 2023, and staff began implementation in January. Through the LWP program, MCWD can provide

technical and financial assistance to partner-led projects that provide significant, regional water resource benefits.

The LWP program is not a typical grant program, selected projects are integrated into MCWD's budgeting process and CIP for funding and assistance across the project's lifecycle, from early coordination to concept development to feasibility and implementation. The LWP program provides a transparent process for partner-led projects to be incorporated into MCWD's CIP; it strengthens the connection between land use and water planning, and it promotes well-coordinated, high-impact projects at a regional scale.

Eligible capital projects must produce measurable outcomes toward identified MCWD water resource goals. State, regional, or local agencies; private developers; and landowners with the capacity to lead project implementation are eligible to apply. There are two annual submittal deadlines, one in February and one in April, for requesting support with project implementation or feasibility work, respectively. MCWD uses scoring criteria, vetted by the Board and TAC, to inform the evaluation and selection process. Submittals are scored on water resource priority, project benefits, effectiveness, and partner capacity and coordination.

Moran presented a couple of recent LWP updates to the CAC, including improvements to MCWD's Permitting program and several LWP project opportunities. To effectively identify and leverage changes to the landscape for LWP opportunities, the LWP program requires close and effective coordination with MCWD's Permitting team. Over the past year, MCWD staff have worked to align and enhance the Permitting program. This included developing updated permitting guidance and training materials, implementing rule revisions, and increasing coordination between the Policy and Permitting teams on select permits.

So far, MCWD has completed one LWP pilot project (Maple Creek Improvement Project) and received one LWP submittal from the City of Deephaven. MCWD will be going to the Board in June for a formal decision on project funding for the City of Deephaven's proposal. Over the past year, staff have also identified four potential LWP opportunities. One opportunity is in St. Louis Park, another project in Shorewood, and two other projects in the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed.

Moran said MCWD is still thinking about previous CAC ideas for measuring the success of this program. Previous CAC feedback emphasized the importance of measuring the success of the program's efforts to build relationships and foster early coordination. Staff may provide annual updates on the program to gather additional feedback. Moran thanked the CAC for their time and opened discussion on the program updates.

One CAC member asked if the LWP program is driven by the watershed's municipalities and whether MCWD relies on each municipality to make the first contact. Moran responded that the LWP program fosters co-development of project ideas with partners. She said it is both proactive and reactive. Sometimes staff are reacting to projects coming into MCWD through the Permitting team, however; MCWD also markets the program to potential applicants and conducts annual meetings with the watershed's municipalities to highlight the program and discover their needs.

8:30 pm

6. **Informational Items + Updates**

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- Maul shared an update on the appointment status of Cara Donovan, who recently moved outside of the watershed.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- Manager Maxwell briefly noted that the MCWD Board had authorized design contracts for the East Auburn Wetland Restoration and the County Road 6 Pond Retrofit projects at the May 9, 2024, Board meeting.
- Maxwell also announced that MCWD, MPRB, and the City of Minneapolis had recently finalized and approved a partnership agreement and released an RFP for three Phase 1 projects in the Minnehaha Parkway.

6.3 Staff Updates

- Maul reminded CAC members about the MCWD Board-Staff-CAC field trip, which was rescheduled for May 30, 2024, with activities starting at 1 PM.
- Maul also provided an update on hiring. MCWD recently hired a policy planning coordinator, a water resource scientist, and a planner-project manager. MCWD is in the process of hiring a permitting program manager and a permitting assistant. More positions will be posted over the coming months.
- Lastly, Maul gave an update on water levels and Gray's Bay Dam operations. The watershed was removed from drought classification in mid-April. MCWD opened the dam on May 1, 2024. MCWD operates the dam according to its operating plan, which is guided by specific discharge zones, received and forecasted precipitation, and current and predicted water levels.

8:40 pm

7. **Adjournment**

Tennen. Iverson. All approved.

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, July 17, 2024, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Loftus, Board Liaison)