MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT

QUALITY OF WATER QUALITY OF LIFE

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
MCWD Office, Boardroom
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:
Ricardo Bonner, Joshua Foschi, Robert Glisky, Steve Hage, John Iverson, Suzanne Jiwani, Drew McGovern, Rich Nyquist, Janet Schaefer, Denise Tennen, Sheri Wallace, Kevin Zahler

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:
Lisa Fowler, Laurie Goldsmith

6:30 pm

1. Committee Meeting Call to Order
1.1 Introductions: All CAC, Board, and staff members introduced themselves.

2. Approval of Agenda *(Additions/Corrections/Deletions)*
2.1 January 15, 2025 agenda
Iverson, Schaefer. All approved.

3. Approval of Minutes *(Additions/Corrections/Deletions)*
3.1 November 13, 2024 minutes
Glisky, Tennen, all approved.

4. Action Items
4.1 Executive Committee Election
O'Brien explained the duties of the CAC Executive Committee. Acting Chair Nyquist opened the floor for nominations for CAC Executive team offices, starting with the Chair, then Vice-Chair, followed by two Executive Officer positions. Nyquist and Glisky were nominated for 2025 CAC Chair. CAC members elected Glisky as Chair. Nyquist and Jiwani were nominated for 2025 CAC Vice-Chair. CAC members elected Jiwani as Vice-Chair. Nyquist, Schaefer, and Bonner were nominated for Executive Officer positions. CAC members elected Nyquist and Schaefer for the two Executive Officer positions in 2025. Based on the election, the 2025 CAC Executive Committee composition is as follows: Chair Glisky, Vice-Chair Jiwani, Executive Officers Nyquist and Schaefer.

7:10pm

5. Discussion Items
5.1 Look Ahead – **Wisker**
Wisker began by reflecting on the CAC's role and composition over time and emphasizing the wealth of diverse perspectives within the group. To kickoff the Look Ahead presentation and orient new CAC members, Wisker provided a brief overview of the organization's approach, anchored in MCWD's balanced urban

ecology philosophy, which recognizes that when the natural and built environment exist in harmony, they can underpin a sense of place for the community. Because the District cannot control all of the land within its jurisdiction, to achieve its vision of balanced urban ecology, MCWD's work is built on a foundation of partnership to integrate land and water planning. Integrated planning allows MCWD to layer natural resources, infrastructure investments, community development, parks and greenspace, and other community priorities, to create projects that provide a multitude of benefits. To achieve its mission, MCWD focuses on two arms of the organization: capital projects and policy.

MCWD positions its work in a strategic planning context anchored in its 10-year watershed management planning cycles. MCWD is over halfway through its last planning cycle and approaching its next Watershed Management Plan (WMP) update in 2027. To drive progress toward the 2027 WMP, MCWD adopted a Strategic Action Plan in 2024, which the CAC vetted. The Strategic Action Plan includes five key areas of work, including (1) expanding MCWD's portfolio of capital projects; (2) developing meaningful climate action policy; (3) cultivating strategic partnerships to create shared value; (4) enhancing data-driven decision-making; and (5) investing in people and organizational culture.

After providing the overarching strategic context for the organization, Wisker walked through MCWD's project portfolio across its focal geographies. MCWD focuses investments in areas of high need and opportunity that have the potential to provide significant regional benefits to the watershed as a whole. Over the past decade, MCWD has focused in the Minnehaha Creek subwatershed, as well as in three large subwatersheds that drain to impaired bays on Lake Minnetonka: Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay, Long Lake Creek, and Painter Creek-Jennings Bay.

As the headwaters for the watershed, MCWD has invested significant time and resources in the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay (SMCHB) subwatershed, which drains into Halsted Bay, the most degraded bay on Lake Minnetonka. Located in the western portion of the watershed, the SMCHB subwatershed is a 27-square mile geography that encompasses the cities of Victoria, St. Bonifacius, and Laketown township. MCWD has worked with public and private partners in the watershed to advance policies that integrate land and water planning and develop capital projects that improve the subwatershed's 14-lake system. To tackle the system's impairments, MCWD broke the subwatershed into management units and took a three-pronged strategy focusing on (1) landscape improvements, (2) carp management, and (3) alum dosing.

In 2023, MCWD completed the largest habitat restoration project in the region, managing carp populations across the 14-lake system. The program met carp removal goals but so far MCWD's monitoring efforts haven't demonstrated a consistent lake response. To learn more about when and where carp management is an effective restoration tool, in 2024, MCWD partnered with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), and the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) on a study analyzing carp management, water quality, and vegetation data from programs across the state. MCWD has also worked as part of its three-pronged strategy to treat lakes with alum, restore wetlands, treat regional stormwater, and, with the City of Victoria, build a new waterfront park on Wassermann Lake. The last decade of investment has begun to yield significant, measurable improvements in the subwatershed, in fact, Wassermann Lake met water quality standards for the first time in its monitored history in 2023.

MCWD is continuing to advance work in this subwatershed by moving downstream within the system. MCWD kicked off design work on the East Auburn Wetland Restoration project between Wassermann and East Auburn lakes in 2024; the project is poised to restore the wetland, which has become a source of nutrient pollution due to years of degradation. MCWD recently signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Victoria, committing to proactive land use planning and collaborative project opportunities in the Turbid-Lundsten corridor. Additionally, MCWD has also completed state-funded diagnostic work near Mud Lake and has been investigating an Alum treatment facility on Halsted Bay to reduce nutrient pollution.

A CAC member asked a question about the reason for the nutrient sourcing in the East Auburn wetland and the solutions considered. Wisker explained that legacy nutrient pollution and the hydrologic manipulation of the wetland system resulted in a buildup of nutrients within the wetland. He explained that when the wetland receives large volumes of precipitation, nutrient pollution is exported with the water leaving the wetland. MCWD identified hydrologic restoration of the wetland through the installation of an outlet control structure as the most feasible and cost-effective opportunity to reduce nutrient export to East Auburn Lake and is currently working through the design process.

Moving to the Long Lake Creek subwatershed, on the other side of Lake Minnetonka, Wisker explained that MCWD has also been working in partnership with public and NGO partners to develop a management plan to restore impaired lakes in the subwatershed, which drains into Tanager Bay on Lake Minnetonka. MCWD evaluated 59 projects and provided a roadmap for communities and partners to lead projects that would contribute to delisting of impaired Wolsfeld, Tanager, and Long Lakes within the subwatershed. The resulting Long Lake Creek Roadmap, outlined three types of projects to provide significant water quality benefits, (1) regional treatment, (2) landscape, (3) internal load management. MCWD is leading or supporting three projects in this region in 2025. MCWD is working with the City of Medina and a private developer to create a regional wetland bank at the Preserve of Medina. The District is also leading a retrofit of a stormwater pond near County Road 6 in Orono to improve its treatment capacity. MCWD secured state grant funding to build a regional stormwater treatment facility at Holbrook Park in Long Lake. MCWD will also work closely with local partners to promote opportunity driven projects in the northern part of the subwatershed which could be supported by the District's Land & Water Partnership (LWP) Program.

In 2025, MCWD is planning to advance diagnostic work in the Painter Creek – Jennings Bay subwatershed, to identify issues, drivers, and strategies for restoration projects that could improve water quality in the region's lakes, and the receiving bays of Lake Minnetonka: Jennings, West Arm, and Harrison's.

Next, Wisker introduced MCWD's work in the Minnehaha Creek subwatershed, across two focal areas: the Minnehaha Creek Greenway and emerging work in Minneapolis along the Minnehaha Parkway. The District is wrapping up work in the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, a series of interconnected projects along the most degraded stretch of Minnehaha Creek between Hopkins and St. Louis Park. In this area, MCWD has integrated regional stormwater management, floodplain restoration, and habitat enhancement with redevelopment opportunities to connect communities to nature. MCWD worked with untraditional partners to

integrate a restored Minnehaha Creek into the Methodist Hospital campus in St. Louis Park. MCWD created the Minnehaha Creek Preserve in 2015, one of the largest urban stream restorations in the country, restoring floodplain wetlands and providing new access to greenspace in an industrialized corridor. The District and the City of Hopkins collaborated to expand Cottageville Park, integrating stormwater treatment with recreational opportunities. Downstream, MCWD and the City of Edina restored Arden Park, remeandering the creek and reconnecting it to its floodplain, while delivering new creek access and regional stormwater treatment benefits. 325 Blake Road will be the capstone of the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, pairing stream restoration and regional stormwater treatment with transit-oriented development, a site plan that would demonstrate MCWD's vision of balanced urban ecology. MCWD purchased the site in 2011 and has worked with a private developer, Alatus, and the City of Hopkins to make the vision a reality, though the project has been delayed over the last few years due to ongoing negotiations with the developer. To complete the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, MCWD is leading a project to connect the Greenway with the Cedar Regional Trail while restoring Minnehaha Creek's channel through the corridor.

Downstream, MCWD has also built on the momentum generated from coordination with the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) with the Nokomis Groundwater and Surface Water Evaluation to form a new partnership to improve water resources in the City, starting with projects on the Minnehaha Parkway. Wisker explained that the partnership is governed by a steering committee with policymakers from each agency, and a governance structure that drives accountability and direction from policymakers through staff. MCWD and its partners are currently advancing feasibility analysis on three Phase 1 capital projects identified from the Minnehaha Parkway Regional Master Plan.

Wisker noted that MCWD's Land & Water Partnership (LWP) program complements its focal geography approach by allowing the District to be responsive to project opportunities watershed-wide. The program, designed for partners, by MCWD's partners, provides an on-ramp for partner led projects that provide significant regional benefits to be integrated into MCWD's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). A CAC member asked if the District had made progress in evaluating the success of the program and recent permitting improvements. Hoppe explained that the program was adopted in 2024, and though it has supported a few projects, it is still rather early to evaluate. However, MCWD is prioritizing the development of an evaluation framework to help the District assess progress as part of its 2027 Plan update process.

Under its two-pronged strategy, in addition to implementing capital projects, MCWD has also worked to advance climate policy that supports resilience across the watershed. Recent boom and bust cycles of drought and extreme precipitation, including the seven wettest years on record from 2013 to 2019, demonstrate that climate change is here. Wisker shared that recent flooding has impacted institutions, public lands, natural systems, and people, often highlighting how historic land use decisions impact communities today and demand policy solutions. In response to the climate pressures facing the watershed, MCWD worked with experts, staff, its Board, and the CAC to develop its Climate Action Framework (CAF). Recognizing MCWD's historic role in flood management, and the existing policy landscape, which has many organizations focused on mitigating carbon emissions, MCWD outlined its role in the face of climate change as a regional, data-driven resource to support flood adaptation.

Based on this role, MCWD's CAF includes three pillars to guide its work leading up to the 2027 WMP, including (1) building out analytical capabilities with a new 2-D model to map watershed flood vulnerabilities, (2) bringing communities together to evaluate policy solutions and plan for the future, and (3) implementing flood management policy and project solutions and adapting as needed. To advance this direction, building an integrated flood management strategy will be the core focus of the 2027 WMP. However, MCWD will also be engaging its communities to develop its next round of focal geography management plans, build out its LWP program, and create an evaluation framework to assess organizational progress over the next decade. Wisker finished by presenting the 2025 CAC meeting schedule, which includes several meetings on the 2027 WMP, an update on MCWD's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Workplan, a discussion of the annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and emerging LWP projects, and the annual budget discussion.

A CAC member asked about MCWD's role in managing aquifers. Wisker explained that many different organizations have mixed responsibilities. MCWD has some jurisdiction over groundwater allocations, as does the MN DNR, the MPCA, and the MN Department of Health.

8:10pm **6. Informational Items + Updates**

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- O'Brien shared that MCWD's Board of Managers recently adopted resolutions recognizing outgoing CAC members Emily Balogh, Marcy Bean, Cara Donovan, and Dan Flo for their service on the CAC.
- O'Brien noted that staff are leading new CAC members through a series of onboarding sessions to prepare them for upcoming CAC engagements. The onboarding process will end with a field trip to an MCWD project site.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- Manager Maxwell shared that the Board of Managers recently authorized the initiation of stakeholder engagement on the 2027 Watershed Management Plan update. MCWD will kick off engagement with a range of stakeholders, including the CAC, early in 2025.
- Manager Maxwell also shared the news that MCWD Administrator, James Wisker, was awarded 2024 Administrator of the Year at the annual Minnesota Watersheds Conference in December, in recognition of his twenty years of service and steadfast leadership of MCWD since 2018.

6.3 Staff Updates

- O'Brien shared that MCWD recently hired a Project Maintenance and Land Management program manager, James McDermond-Spies and is actively hiring for two roles: a Geospatial Information Services (GIS) Coordinator and a Permitting Technician. O'Brien encouraged CAC members to share these postings with their networks.
- O'Brien shared a brief overview of 2024's precipitation conditions, which swung between drought and above-normal rainfall. The Gray's Bay Dam was closed and winterized for the season in November, and Lake Minnetonka's level was 929.59 ft on January 15, 2025.

8:30pm **7. Adjournment**

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, March 19, 2025, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Olson: Board Liaison)