



Wednesday, March 19, 2025

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Minnetonka Community Center, Minnetonka Mills Room
14600 Minnetonka Blvd., Minnetonka, MN 55345
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:

Ricardo Bonner, Joshua Foschi, Lisa Fowler, Robert Glisky, Laurie Goldsmith, Steve Hage, John Iverson, Suzanne Jiwani, Rich Nyquist, Sheri Wallace, Kevin Zahler

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Denise Tennen, Drew McGovern, Lisa Fowler, Janet Schaefer

MCWD Staff Present:

Becky Christopher, Kate Moran, Samantha Hoppe, Maia Irvin, James O'Brien, Veronica Sannes

6:30 pm

1. **Committee Meeting Call to Order**
2. **Approval of Agenda** (*Additions/Corrections/Deletions*)
2.1 March 19, 2025 agenda
Jiwani, Wallace, all approved.
3. **Approval of Minutes** (*Additions/Corrections/Deletions*)
3.1 January 15, 2025 minutes
Nyquist, Bonner, all approved.
4. **Action Items**
None.

6:45 pm

5. **Discussion Items**
5.1 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) and Climate Action Framework (CAF)
Update – **Moran**
Moran framed the first discussion item, which includes updates for two critical, multi-year initiatives, the DEI and Climate Action Frameworks. Staff are seeking input from the CAC on the draft Equity Lens created as part of MCWD's DEI Framework. The [DEI Framework](#) is rooted in MCWD's [Balanced Urban Ecology](#) (BUE) policy and is broken down into three key areas: (1) operations, (2) projects & policies, and (3) outreach & engagement

MCWD will be advancing key action steps in each area in 2025. Moran explained that the first work area, Operations, includes supporting a more inclusive culture

that facilitates staff belonging and professional growth. MCWD has developed a new onboarding socialization model that has been piloted with recent hires.

Under the Projects & Policies work area, MCWD is developing an Equity Lens to provide a consistent framework for how MCWD staff assess, reflect, and identify potential project or policy outcomes that could create or further amplify social, environmental, and/or economic benefits and burdens. Moran walked through the discovery work findings, as well as the approach, content, and structure of the draft Equity Lens, but noted that staff are continuing to refine it with feedback from staff, the CAC, and the Board.

To develop the Equity Lens, staff evaluated 58 equity-focused documents, including 33 equity lens examples. Based on this discovery review, common themes and questions from other organizations' lenses were synthesized and assessed based on their relevance to MCWD's mission and processes. Key recommendations from this discovery work included:

- Leverage key datasets
- Balance depth and breadth across a wide range of considerations
- Be specific about defining who could experience benefits and burdens
- Provide guidance and examples to support effective implementation
- Utilize a team-based approach in implementing the Equity Lens

Based on discovery findings, staff have developed the draft Equity Lens to be integrated into existing project and policy planning and development workflows. The Equity Lens is intended to support MCWD project and policy development and is not intended to direct programmatic project location selection.

The draft Equity Lens is organized into five sections to support analysis

1. Proposed Project or Policy – Provides context and identifies the goals, approach, and intended outcomes of the project/policy.
2. Data Gathering and Analysis – Leverages data and GIS mapping tools to assess disparities related to the project/policy.
3. Community Engagement - Supports development of an engagement strategy and practices to ensure inclusive participation.
4. Benefits and Burdens - Identifies how different communities may experience positive or negative impacts throughout a project/policy lifecycle.
5. Metrics and Accountability – Tracks project/policy success and identifies equity-focused metrics to evaluate impacts after implementation.

CAC members asked about the consideration of project buffer areas and whether staff would consider altering the project design based on the findings from the Equity Lens evaluation. Moran explained that staff are considering buffers at a baseline half-mile and one-mile level from the area of investment and impact. Based on this initial baseline data analysis of demographic data, social vulnerability, and place-based equity data, the equity team can adjust buffers to best inform who is in the project or policy area. CAC members asked about how the Equity Lens would be applied to a project's process and the level of influence it would have on project prioritization. Moran explained that the Equity Lens would be integrated into MCWD's existing workflows for key milestones during a project/policy lifecycle from concept, feasibility and design, to implementation, and is not intended to direct project locations, prioritization, or decision-making. Manager Olson reinforced that this tool is intended to build internal skills for staff and the Board to consider the holistic impacts of MCWD's work, and as skills are built, it will take less time and effort to complete.

CAC members also asked about workflow integration and what team would be involved in the evaluation. Moran explained that a cross-functional team, including project, policy, and outreach staff, would be involved in reviewing the completed Equity Lens. CAC members also noted that there would “always be winners and losers” in projects, and suggested language adjustments regarding project scope to improve clarity.

CAC members asked about the scope of stakeholders identified in the equity lens analysis, and Moran clarified that the Equity Lens would help outline who makes what decisions and how stakeholders would be engaged throughout the project. Another CAC member noted that equity should be considered earlier in the process to avoid unintended consequences, like gentrification. A CAC member also noted that in some cases, natural resource improvements can create new opportunities for communities nearby, highlighting examples in the Minnehaha Creek Greenway. Moran noted that, true to its mission, MCWD would continue to leverage sound water resource science to identify and prioritize water resource projects and noted that the equity lens adds another layer, serving as a tool to help staff identify impacts early on, like gentrification, to inform project design and partnerships with those that have a broader mission, such as municipalities. CAC members cautioned against turning the Equity Lens into a checklist and advised staff to be cautious with data as it can be easily manipulated or misconstrued.

Reflecting on their past experiences, CAC members noted that other Equity Lenses consider mitigation approaches that could help disadvantaged groups. CAC members also noted that public awareness of the benefits of MCWD’s projects can be a powerful tool to build trust in MCWD’s approach. CAC members suggested considering quality of life indicators used by Sustainable Seattle or other organizations as part of an Equity Lens evaluation. CAC members reflected support for the Equity Lens approach and content, and MCWD’s approach of evaluating past and upcoming projects with the Equity Lens to pilot the approach. Moran thanked CAC members for their feedback and noted staff are working through case studies to inform refinements and anticipate being back in front of the CAC in November 2025.

Moran then transitioned to an overview of other DEI action steps. MCWD will be developing a DEI policy and a set of goals and metrics to increase transparency and accountability in progress toward all MCWD goals, particularly Thriving Communities. CAC members also recognized that DEI initiatives should be prioritized internally, to increase diversity within the staff, Board, and CAC. Moran and Hoppe noted that this is a goal of the organization. Moran also shared that upon completion of the DEI Framework action steps, the District anticipates bringing in a consultant to perform a gap analysis of MCWD’s DEI approach.

Moran closed out the DEI workplan by highlighting the Outreach work area, which includes the development of a DEI Engagement Framework. The Engagement Framework aims to complement the Equity Lens by providing staff with tailored engagement strategies that are rooted in data and leverage industry best practices. The Engagement Framework will also include an engagement toolkit and Language Access Plan. A CAC member asked about local tribal engagement as part of this process. Moran noted that MCWD anticipates initiating local tribal government engagement in 2026 and 2027.

Moran then provided an update on MCWD's [Climate Action Framework](#) (CAF). Over the past decade, MCWD engaged the Board, CAC, and staff in evaluating climate action efforts across the industry and outlined MCWD's role in climate action. Flood mitigation was identified as a key focus area for MCWD's climate action efforts. MCWD's CAF outlines three pillars with near-term actions. Moran provided a brief overview of the action steps under each pillar, including the building of a 2-D model, the convening process with partners and the community, the development of the Flood Action Plan, and MCWD's efforts to assess and prioritize operational improvements to support climate mitigation.

CAC members asked how MCWD would consider and prioritize flood impacts, recognizing the intersection with equity and social vulnerability. Moran explained the core function of establishing the Flood Action Plan was to provide clarity on roles and responsibilities internally and how MCWD staff would mobilize in an emergency flood event. A CAC member offered to review the Flood Action Plan based on past professional experiences. Manager Olson commended staff and other stakeholders involved in developing the CAF, which has been recognized by local, state, and national leaders.

8:10 PM

5.2 2027 Watershed Management Plan (WMP) Update – Christopher

Christopher noted that with new members and the need for continued engagement, staff wanted to provide a brief overview of the scope and engagement plan for the 2027 WMP update. Christopher explained that the WMP is an important guiding document, required by state statute, that outlines and communicates the organization's direction and priorities for the next decade. Christopher explained that the 2017 Plan was a major shift to orient the organization around its BUE policy. Recognizing this direction has served MCWD well, it plans to carry this work forward in the Plan update, while adding a new layer of focus on integrated flood management.

Christopher noted that CAC input provided at the [November 13, 2025, CAC meeting](#) has informed key messaging for the Plan update. In particular, she highlighted feedback on continuing the BUE direction, the justification for selecting focal areas, and clarifying continuation of MCWD's water quality work.

MCWD has outlined four focus areas of work for the Plan:

1. Integrated Flood Management
2. Focal Geographies
3. Land & Water Partnership (LWP) Program
4. Evaluation Framework

Christopher then provided an overview of the Engagement Plan for the WMP. MCWD has developed a stakeholder engagement matrix reflecting key audiences and level of engagement for each specific WMP work area. Christopher highlighted that a critical point of CAC engagement will be on the Evaluation Framework work area. MCWD plans to utilize a suite of different engagement methodologies as part of the Engagement Framework. MCWD has identified a four-stage process for advisory committee engagement:

- Discovery: Align goals for the process and build shared understanding.
- Direction: Identify flood management goals, strategies, and tradeoffs.
- Data Analysis: Test strategies with scenarios using the 2D model.
- Decisions: Develop policies and an implementation framework.

Christopher finished by outlining the following key CAC touchpoints for 2025 related to the WMP update:

- May: LWP program and focal geographies discussion
- July: Budget and WMP kickoff messaging
- November: Evaluation Framework, public engagement approach/survey

8:25 pm

6. Informational Items + Updates

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- O'Brien noted that MCWD has wrapped up virtual onboarding sessions for the new members. The onboarding experience will conclude with a field trip to an MCWD project site, likely in May.
- Wallace noted that Harrison's Bay Association is selling rain barrels. More information is available on their [website](#).
- Nyquist shared an article on agriculture and water quality.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- Olson shared an update on MCWD's permitting approach, applauding staff for their can-do attitude and ability to provide creative solutions on complex permits, including the recent redesign of the Burl Oaks Golf Course.
- Olson also recognized staff efforts to advance the Morningside Stormwater Improvement Project, an LWP project led by the City of Medina, focused on stabilizing eroding ravines and treating regional stormwater.
- Olson closed by reminding members of the upcoming East Auburn Wetland Restoration public meeting.

6.3 Staff Updates

O'Brien provided updates on capital projects, hiring, and dam operations:

- Minneapolis Partnership: MCWD, the City of Minneapolis, and MPRB are nearing completion on feasibility for the phase 1 projects. MCWD staff will present to the steering committee this spring on feasibility findings and outline next steps for advancing one of the projects. This meeting will also include planning for future project investment.
- SMCHB Habitat Restoration: In continuation of the SMCHB habitat restoration work, the R&M team completed a carp seine on Parley Lake in late February. Over 20,000 pounds of carp biomass were removed. Some carp were also marked with radio tags to improve population tracking and to inform future removal efforts.
- County Road 6 Stormwater Pond Retrofit: After reaching the 60% design milestone, MCWD will host a public meeting to provide information on the project at the Orono City Hall on April 3rd from 6:30 – 8:00 PM.
- East Auburn Wetland Restoration: After reaching the 60% design milestone, MCWD will host a public meeting to provide information on the project at the Victoria City Hall on March 25th from 6:30 – 8:00 PM.
- MCWD Hiring: MCWD recently hired for two positions, GIS Coordinator and Permitting Assistant, both starting in late March and early April, respectively.
- Water Levels and Dam Operations: Gray's Bay Dam remains closed for the 2024 season, in accordance with the dam's operating plan. The dam will remain closed until this spring, following ice-out. MCWD staff are closely monitoring conditions on Lake Minnetonka, which is currently at 928.7 feet. Minnehaha Creek was measured at 18.2 cubic feet per second at the Hiwatha Avenue gauge.

8:45 pm

7. Adjournment

Goldsmith, Nyquist. All Approved.

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, May 14, 2025, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Miller: Board Liaison)