MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT

QUALITY OF WATER QUALITY OF LIFE

Wednesday, September 17, 2025

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
MCWD 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 Hejmadi

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Present:
Ricardo Bonner, Joshua Foschi, Robert Glisky, Laurie Goldsmith, Steve Hage, John Iverson, Suzanne Jiwani, Drew McGovern, Janet Schaefer, Sheri Wallace,

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:
Rich Nyquist, Kevin Zahler

MCWD Staff Members Present:
Becky Christopher, Samantha Hoppe, Maia Irvin, James O'Brien

6:30 pm

1. Committee Meeting Call to Order
Chair Glisky called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Agenda *(Additions/Corrections/Deletions)*
2.1 September 17, 2025 agenda
Schafer, Iverson, all approved.

3. Approval of Minutes *(Additions/Corrections/Deletions)*
3.1 July 16, 2025 minutes
Iverson, Jiwani, all approved.

4. Action Items
No action items.

6:45 pm

5. Discussion Items
5.1 2027 Watershed Management Plan Update – **Christopher/Hoppe**
Outreach Manager, Samantha Hoppe, provided a review of the 2027 Watershed Management Plan (Plan) scope and timeline, which was covered in detail at the November 13, 2024, CAC meeting. Every 10 years, MCWD is required to update its Plan to set the strategic direction for the following decade while promoting alignment of key water resource priorities in collaboration with member communities. The 2027 Plan will be a continuation of the policy direction set in the 2017 Plan which centered on delivering a vision of Balanced Urban Ecology (BUE) through partnership and integrated planning.

While the 2027 Plan will carry forward the vision of BUE, it will be centered on applying this approach to build an Integrated Flood Management Strategy that supports long-term flood resilience. A CAC member asked where this big idea came from. Hoppe explained that this focus for the Plan grew out of the development of our Climate Action Framework, which identified that the District has a critical role to play in addressing the regional impacts of flooding by providing a data-driven understanding of impacts at a watershed scale and convening cities/partners to develop a cohesive management strategy. As part of the 2027 Plan development, over the next two years, MCWD will conduct an extensive engagement process with our communities. Hoppe mentioned that the soft rollout of this engagement has started with annual coordination meetings with the watershed's 29 communities, to introduce the Plan's scope, solicit input, and share information on the broader engagement process. The broader engagement process will include many touchpoints with the watershed's stakeholders, but will center around a multi-year advisory committee process involving technical staff and policymakers representing member communities.

As staff began planning the engagement process and preparing materials, it became clear that additional research on the history of flood management and the effectiveness of various management strategies was needed, so staff began developing a White Paper. The Draft White Paper, organized into five chapters, chronicles the history of land use and stormwater management approaches that supported the watershed's development, as well as how those approaches are being assessed amid changing precipitation patterns. Hoppe asked the CAC to provide feedback on the narrative and how it aligns with the 2027 Plan engagement process. A CAC member asked about CAC access to the Draft White Paper and potential publishing in an academic journal. Hoppe explained that CAC members would have access to the final version of the White Paper and that staff are currently discussing the process for a publication.

Hoppe began stepping through each of the five chapters, inviting questions from CAC members as she reviewed each. The first chapter summarizes the history of development in the watershed, including the perspectives and philosophies that shaped land use decisions, stormwater management approaches, and the natural resource implications today. Much of the watershed developed before today's environmental regulations, and the planning and engineering philosophies of the time led to wetlands being filled, lakes being dredged, and Minnehaha Creek being ditched and moved to make way for development. Communities constructed stormwater conveyance systems to move water off the landscape, and toward downstream waters as quickly as possible, to provide a dry and sanitary city conducive to development.

Hoppe began the review of the second chapter of the White Paper, focused on water resource governance. In the late twentieth century, many communities began to experience the effects of historic land use and engineering decisions on the region's water resources. Intense precipitation and subsequent flooding, as well as growing attention to degrading water quality in the lakes, rivers, and streams, catalyzed support for a regulatory framework for water resources. This resulted in a suite of federal and state regulatory programs and policies, including the passage of the Minnesota Watershed District Act and the Wetland Conservation Act. While these efforts have yielded significant positive outcomes for both water resources and communities, challenges and gaps still exist, namely, the lack of integration between land and water resource planning. A CAC member commented on the challenges of collaboration with communities

and regulatory agencies regarding significant water resource issues. Manager Hejmadi noted the importance of community influence as a catalyst for agency coordination. He noted MCWD's annual meetings are a starting point for this effort. He provided other national examples where this process is already occurring and can be used as a model. A CAC member flagged that lack of community leadership can be a hindrance to community organizations and water resource agencies solving issues. Another member reflected that collaboration is difficult due to the division of land use and water resource management.

Hoppe moved on to the third chapter of the White Paper, focused on the complexities of stormwater management in a changing climate. Climate trends show that intense precipitation patterns are increasing, and the cumulative impacts are influencing flood risk across the watershed. Historic land use decisions and development patterns are exacerbating these risks, leaving communities vulnerable to flooding. Municipalities are working to mitigate these impacts, responding with local studies, new models, and flood mitigation projects. Hoppe shared examples of different flood mitigation efforts by communities and framed some of the challenges with projects that move water across communities.

A CAC member asked about MCWD's role in these kinds of projects that move water from an upstream to downstream community. Director of Policy Planning, Becky Christopher, noted that MCWD has been consulted and involved on a voluntary partnership basis, but noted that volume conveyance and management falls outside of MCWD's current regulatory framework. A CAC member asked if there is a state regulatory framework to manage these types of projects or if MCWD could develop its own rule to address this. Christopher noted there is no current state framework, but MCWD plans to use its 2027 Plan engagement process to scope out what this could look like, with communities. A CAC member noted that flooding outputs from the 2D model could be used to help reinforce the need for this rule. A CAC member asked how predictive ponds are typically funded. Christopher stated that cities typically finance these efforts. Hoppe continued by highlighting some regional studies focused on assessing flood mitigation strategies, which concluded that traditional conveyance strategies alone cannot meet future flood mitigation needs, and more storage is necessary to support long-term flood resilience.

Hoppe moved to chapter 4 of the White Paper, focused on how research and academic literature point to nature-based solutions as the most effective solution to build resilience in a changing climate. Nature-based solutions are focused on slowing and storing water by mimicking natural systems. She noted that nature-based solutions will not replace stormwater conveyance systems, but can help alleviate the burden these systems are facing with changing precipitation patterns. Hoppe then shared some national and international case studies of nature-based solutions to showcase the many benefits they provide to flood mitigation and beyond. CAC members also provided examples of other nature-based flood mitigation efforts in Burnsville, MN, and Kansas City, MO. Hoppe then highlighted some of the implementation barriers for a nature-based approach, including space constraints, existing infrastructure complications, up-front costs, and institutional norms.

Hoppe then introduced the fifth and final chapter, which outlines how an integrated planning approach can help overcome these barriers and support the delivery of nature-based flood mitigation projects wherever feasible. A balanced,

integrated flood management strategy affirms the BUE approach MCWD has deployed over the last decade. Hoppe shared examples of past MCWD work in the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, which reinforces the value of an integrated approach to land and water resource planning. Hoppe closed by framing that a goal of the 2027 Plan engagement process is to figure out how MCWD can better support communities in integrated planning and determine how a balance of both conveyance and storage solutions can be achieved to support long-term flood resilience.

CAC members then engaged in a small group activity to collect feedback on the White Paper presentation. Discussion questions focused on key takeaways, messaging, and identifying challenges to the Plan engagement process. Overall, the key takeaways from members included: 1) there is much to learn from past land use and water resource decisions; 2) cross-agency and cross-community collaboration is vital; 3) nature-based and storage-first flood solutions have strong long-term potential and multiple co-benefits; 4) early coordination among partners increases the chance of success. The most convincing messages that members noted include: 1.) historical lessons that help explain current challenges; 2) the co-benefits of nature-based solutions go beyond flood control (e.g., recreation, health, sense of place); 3) emphasizing the costs of inaction; 4) the importance of partnerships to alleviate barriers. The key challenges to the engagement process that members identified included: 1) high upfront costs and concern over long-term funding; 2) staff limitations and capacity issues in under-resourced cities; 3) existing city priorities and institutional norms that resist change.

CAC members then reviewed the Draft Plan Kick-Off Publication. Members were encouraged to provide general feedback on the design and content, as well as their perspectives on how well the publication sets the stage for the Plan engagement process. Overall, CAC members indicated that the draft publication was a compelling resource and will be very helpful with setting the stage for the Plan engagement process. However, members provided some feedback to help improve the overall effectiveness of the publication, including: 1) improving the readability of the publication to make the content easier to quickly digest; 2) clarifying or emphasizing the key concepts, such as the technical differences between conveyance and storage interventions; 3) restructuring or reordering the content to create more white space within the publication and improve its flow.

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

6.1 CAC Member Updates

No member updates were provided.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

Manager Hejmadi provided updates on active capital projects across the watershed, highlighting that both the East Auburn Wetland Restoration Project and the County Road 6 Pond Retrofit Project were recently awarded construction contracts. Construction for both projects is expected to begin this winter. He also highlighted that the contract for the Downtown Long Lake Feasibility Study was awarded, and the study will begin later this month.

6.3 Staff Updates

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

- 2026 CAC Recruitment: Recruitment for the 2026 CAC has begun. The application opened on September 8th and will close on October 20th. Members up for reappointment were encouraged to reapply.

- Capital Project Updates: The Greenway to Cedar Trail Connection Project reached 60% design, and MCWD and the City of St. Louis Park are hosting a public open house on September 30th from 6:30 to 8:00 PM at the Municipal Service Center in St. Louis Park. MCWD continues to navigate court-ordered mediation regarding development on the 325 Blake Road Redevelopment Project. Following completion of the SMCHB Restoration Project, MCWD, in partnership with MAISRC, the MPCA, and the MN DNR, conducted a comprehensive study to better understand where and when carp management should be implemented to be most effective as a lake restoration strategy. A final report on the findings from that study is nearing completion, and will inform an MCWD-specific resource on lake management and restoration.
- Water Levels and Gray's Bay Dam Operations: Gray's Bay Dam has begun its seasonal drawdown to prepare for winter ice-in, in accordance with its operating plan. As of September 17th, Lake Minnetonka sits at 929.11 feet, and Minnehaha Creek flow is 73.7 cubic feet per second (cfs) at the Hiawatha Ave gauge. Gray's Bay Dam is discharging at 75 cfs in accordance with Zone 4 of the operating plan.

8:30 pm **7.** **Adjournment**

Iverson, Goldsmith, all approved.

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, November 12, 2025, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Sando: Board Liaison)