



Wednesday, July 16, 2025

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

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 Loftus

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Present:

Ricardo Bonner, Joshua Foschi, Robert Glisky, Laurie Goldsmith, Steve Hage, John Iverson, Suzanne Jiwani, Drew McGovern, Rich Nyquist, Janet Schaefer, Sheri Wallace, Kevin Zahler

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Denise Tennen, Lisa Fowler

MCWD Staff Members Present:

James Wisker, James O'Brien, Samantha Hoppe, Maia Irvin

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 July 16, 2025 agenda
Nyquist, Schaefer. *All approved.*
3. **Approval of Minutes (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
3.1 May 14, 2025 minutes
Wallace, Bonner. *All approved.*
4. **Action Items**
No action items.

6:40 pm

5. **Discussion Items**
5.1 2026 Draft Budget – **Wisker**
Wisker began the presentation by outlining its core goals: to orient the CAC to the annual budget process, provide an overview of the draft budget, test its assumptions, and gather feedback on both the content and supporting communications. He noted that MCWD is considering updates to its approach to the annual Budget & Workplan publication. These changes may include more targeted distribution to cities within the watershed and incorporating community perspectives.

Wisker walked the CAC through the overarching budget process. He explained that the committee's review takes place midway through the process—after early discussions with the Board of Managers and before the public hearing, budget

adoption, and certification, which typically occur in September. At the highest level, MCWD is proposing a modest 1% increase in the 2026 budget, covering Operations, Programs, Debt Service, and Capital Projects. The most significant change appears in the 2026 Operations budget, which reflects the addition of a new full-time employee, updates to facilities, and inflation-related increases in contracted services. The Programs budget is projected to decrease slightly in 2026, while Debt Service will remain relatively flat since no new bonds are expected with Hennepin or Carver counties. The Capital Projects budget is projected to increase by 0.8%. To fund these expenses, MCWD will rely on a flat levy for 2026, supported by fund balances from past projects and programs, grant and partner contributions, interest income, permit fees, and reimbursements. Together, these revenue sources will support a balanced budget.

Wisker offered more detail on the Programs budgets, noting that personnel expenses are fully accounted for in the Programs budget. The Permitting budget is projected to rise by 3.6% to cover inflation in engineering and legal services. Planning and project expenses, which include project planning, management, maintenance, and policy development, are expected to increase by 12.8%, largely due to ongoing work on the 2027 Watershed Management Plan (WMP). This work involves convening stakeholders, conducting policy analysis, scenario planning, and other foundational tasks. In terms of geographic focus, MCWD will continue project planning and implementation in its [focal areas](#): Minnehaha Creek, Six Mile Creek–Halsted Bay, Long Lake Creek, and Painter Creek subwatersheds. The Project Maintenance Program is growing, with increasing costs anticipated for vegetation management and contracted services in 2026. The Outreach budget will experience a small decrease of 0.2% as the department continues to build internal capacity for supporting key projects and initiatives. Turning to the Research & Monitoring Program, Wisker explained that a major line item—funding from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) to support the development of the 2-D Watershed Model—will be closed in 2026 after the model's completion in 2025. This will result in a decrease of 29.5% to the program budget.

A CAC member asked how stormwater pond maintenance is categorized in the 2026 budget. Wisker explained that MCWD has shifted these costs from the Project Maintenance Program to the Capital Projects budget, due to the infrequent but substantial nature of such work. When asked about the distinction between stormwater ponds and natural wetlands, Wisker clarified that constructed wetlands are monitored and maintained with dredging and other activities, while natural wetlands are protected and typically not dredged, unless it's tied to permitted restoration activities. He referenced an ongoing wetland restoration project near East Auburn Lake as an example of hydrologic restoration involving excavation. Another member inquired about the Cynthia Krieg and Cost Share Grant programs under the Outreach budget. Wisker noted that these grants, which previously supported residential projects like rain gardens, rain barrels, and awareness campaigns, have been discontinued, and are slowly being phased out of the budget.

When asked about public engagement, Wisker acknowledged that while member cities tend to engage actively in the budget process, public turnout is generally limited. He also addressed questions about the legal costs associated with the ongoing 325 Blake Road litigation, noting that MCWD's expenses are covered through insurance provided by the League of Minnesota Cities. He added that

the District had recently prevailed on a temporary restraining order request by the opposing party and is moving toward mediation.

A question about flood mitigation along Minnehaha Creek in context of recent events in Texas, brought the discussion to MCWD's [Climate Action Framework](#). Wisker explained that the District is focused on two key actions: first, building long-term resilience through collaborative planning; and second, developing a short-term Flood Response Plan that outlines MCWD's coordination with the National Weather Service, Hennepin County, and emergency managers to forecast and manage flood risks. Another CAC member asked whether the budget includes contingency funds for unexpected costs. Wisker responded that while there isn't a formal contingency line item, unspent funds are typically reallocated to long-term capital project expenditures, offering flexibility to respond to unforeseen events.

A CAC member raised a question about staff and facility security. Wisker acknowledged that security is not currently addressed in the budget but agreed that it's an important topic for future consideration. He noted that the District does coordinate with law enforcement in compliance situations. Manager Loftus supported the idea and suggested possible partnerships with the City of Minnetonka or implementing a buddy system. CAC members shared examples from Hennepin and Carver counties of similar protocols for public meetings and field interactions. Wisker thanked the committee for the suggestions and said staff would explore options.

Wisker then transitioned to the [Capital Improvement Plan](#) (CIP) and associated [Land & Water Partnership](#) (LWP) Program expenses for 2026. He highlighted upcoming LWP projects, including a stormwater project in Deephaven and a feasibility study to identify water quality projects in downtown Long Lake. The 2026 CIP includes three stormwater pond maintenance projects: dredging at [County Road 6](#) (combined with a retrofit), dredging at Twin Lakes in St. Louis Park, and a potential retrofit of the Cedar Meadows stormwater facility near Cedar Lake. A [wetland restoration project](#) is planned in the Six Mile Creek–Halsted Bay Subwatershed, near East Auburn Lake and Wassermann Lake. In the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, MCWD has budgeted for several ongoing initiatives: the [Greenway–Cedar Regional Trail Connection](#), the [325 Blake Road](#) project, expansion of [Cottageville Park](#), and work at Meadowbrook Golf Course.

A CAC member asked about MCWD's involvement in a proposed golf course redesign in Wayzata. Wisker explained that the City has taken authority for water resource regulation within its boundaries, limiting MCWD's role in the project. Wisker closed the capital project section by previewing a new partnership with the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, which will focus on projects along [Minnehaha Parkway](#). The partners are planning to advance the first project into design in 2026.

To conclude, Wisker reviewed the structure and content of the 2026 Budget & Workplan publication, and opened the floor for CAC feedback and discussion. Members recommended highlighting progress in the Painter Creek Subwatershed, varying image selections to avoid redundancy, and providing clearer detail on project results and the impacts of investments. They also asked that MCWD explicitly identify partner contributions in the budget and consider replacing the current temperature chart in the WMP section with a precipitation graphic. Members suggested that results be clearly marked as actual or

estimated, and that maps include impaired waterbodies to help reinforce priorities. Some noted it was difficult to track how budget breakdowns align with key highlights, and recommended including community-level goals or metrics to personalize the document. Additional suggestions included moving the focal geography map earlier in the document to frame those sections more clearly, and expanding content on LWP projects to ensure community representation is visible. Wisker and the staff team thanked the CAC for their feedback, which will be incorporated into the final publication to the extent possible.

8:20 pm

6. Informational Items + Updates

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- Schaefer thanked MCWD staff for the materials provided for the Buckthorn Days event in Long Lake.
- Iverson expressed gratitude to MCWD staff for their efforts on the recent CAC Field Trip.
- Bonner shared that he recently attended a Board meeting and recommends it as a great learning experience for CAC members.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- Manager Loftus recognized James Wisker for his 20 years of service to MCWD, which the Board and staff team celebrated in late June.
- Manager Loftus also shared brief updates on progress on the [Downtown Long Lake Feasibility study](#) and efforts to advance the [Gateway to the Minnehaha Creek Greenway](#) at the 325 Blake Road site.

6.3 Staff Updates

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

- All MCWD Field Trip: The field trip was held on June 5th near Lake Nokomis Beach Park in Minneapolis, marking the completion of the onboarding process for four new CAC members.
- Capital Projects: MCWD staff released bids for construction for both the [County Road 6 Pond Retrofit](#) project in Long Lake and the [East Auburn Wetland Restoration](#) Project in Victoria. It is anticipated that construction for both will begin this winter and be completed in early 2026.
- MCWD Hiring: MCWD recently hired an Office Coordinator and Permitting Assistant.
- Water Levels and Dam Operations: Grays Bay Dam opened on May 15th for the season. Intense rainfall at the end of June resulted in elevated water levels. Grays Bay Dam discharge is set at 150 cubic feet per second (cfs) as prescribed in Zone 4 of the Operating Plan to recapture storage on Lake Minnetonka and bring the lake toward its Ordinary High Water Level (OHWL), while balancing flows in Minnehaha Creek. Lake Minnetonka sits at 929.57 feet, and Minnehaha Creek is flowing at 312 cfs at the Hiawatha Avenue gauge.
- A CAC member asked about the cost of operating the dam. Wisker explained that there are a variety of costs associated with different levels of operation, such as maintenance, monitoring, and communication, but staff would follow-up with a more detailed overview.

8:45 pm

7. Adjournment

Jiwani, Goldsmith. All approved. Meeting adjourned.

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, September 17, 2025, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Hejmadi: Board Liaison)