



**Title:** Public Hearing to Consider Minor Plan Amendment

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**Purpose:**

A public hearing will take place on March 12, 2026 at the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) Board Meeting to obtain public input on the proposed minor plan amendment to MCWD's Watershed Management Plan.

**Summary**

MCWD staff have proposed a minor amendment to the MCWD Watershed Management Plan (WMP) to incorporate internal lake nutrient load management (e.g., alum or similar treatment) as a potential pollutant load reduction strategy within the Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed. This amendment will support ongoing joint planning efforts with the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), specifically the development of the Cedar Lake Management Unit (MU) Plan, and position the partners to pursue future state grant funding for water quality improvements at Cedar Lake.

**Background**

In 2024, the City of Minneapolis, the MPRB, and MCWD formalized a partnership through a Cooperative Agreement, subsequently named the Minneapolis Thriving Waters Partnership, to deliver impactful projects that improve water resources and enhance thriving communities in the "City of Lakes."

In 2025, the partners completed a feasibility study for [three Phase 1 projects along Minnehaha Creek](#), and the Partnership's steering committee selected the first project to advance into design. In parallel, the partnership's Technical Team, comprised of staff from each agency, initiated development of a series of Management Unit (MU) plans to inform long-range project identification and implementation across Minneapolis.

The first of these plans, the Cedar Lake Management Unit Plan, is currently under development and will be finalized in early 2026. The Cedar Lake MU Plan will outline water quality conditions, key nutrient drivers, and potential strategies to address both external and internal nutrient sources affecting Cedar Lake and upstream waters.

While each partner maintains its own capital improvement planning processes, the MU planning framework is intended to support alignment across agencies, facilitate coordinated investment, and guide future implementation strategies in MCWD's Watershed Management Plan (WMP).

**Cedar Lake Management Unit**

Cedar Lake has been and remains a high priority for MPRB due to recurring public health concerns, beach closures, and recent [harmful algal blooms](#) (HABs). In 2023, MPRB independently completed HAB studies that further documented water quality issues and concerns in the lake.

Given Cedar Lake's location at the top of the Chain of Lakes watershed, its influence on downstream lakes, the recent adoption of MPRB's 2023 Cedar-Isles Master Plan, and MPRB's identification of potential watershed retrofits such as

improvements to the Cedar Meadows Stormwater Facility, the partners aligned around the development of a Cedar Lake MU Plan to guide both mid-term implementation and long-term watershed strategy.

Delivery of the Cedar Lake MU Plan will provide a replicable model for future MU plans across Minneapolis, creating a structured pathway to identify projects and advance them into coordinated capital improvement planning efforts.

MPRB has expressed interest in pursuing external funding, including Clean Water Fund (CWF) grants, to support internal lake sediment treatment for Cedar Lake. To be competitive for CWF funding, proposed projects must be included in an approved water management plan. The MU Plan will support MPRB's efforts to strengthen its application for CWF grants.

Because MPRB does not have an independent water management plan, MCWD or the City of Minneapolis must serve as the applicant and fiscal agent for such grants. MCWD has agreed to lead development of the Cedar Lake MU Plan, support necessary amendments to MCWD's WMP, and has discussed serving as fiscal agent for potential state grant funds. MPRB would lead the grant application, assemble a full funding strategy including local match, and oversee design, bidding, and construction/application if the internal sediment management project is successful in receiving grant funds.

### **Minor Plan Amendment**

The proposed Minor Plan Amendment adds internal nutrient load management as a potential implementation strategy within the Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed's Stormwater Volume and Pollutant Load Reduction capital improvement program (CIP). This amendment is consistent with existing WMP subwatershed plan discussions that recognize internal nutrient loading and the potential need to address it when conditions and supporting data indicate it is appropriate. The amendment does not commit MCWD to a specific project, funding level, or timeline, but ensures the WMP reflects a full range of strategies that may be needed to address nutrient impairments identified through ongoing planning.

At the February 12, 2026 Board meeting, MCWD Board of Managers authorized distribution of the proposed Minor Plan Amendment, in accordance with Minnesota Rules Chapter 8410, and has requested review and comment from city, county, and agency partners. The comment period will close on March 20, 2026 and staff anticipate seeking the Board's approval of the Minor Plan Amendment on March 26, 2026. In addition, the Board of Managers must hold a public hearing, and the hearing has been duly noticed for the March 12, 2026 Board meeting.

### **Supporting Documents:**

- Attachment 1: Draft Watershed Management Plan minor amendment

Table 3.12 Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed CIP

Project	Stormwater Volume and Pollutant Load Reduction
Description	<p>Implementation of opportunities to reduce stormwater volumes and nutrient loading to Minnehaha Creek and Lake Hiawatha, including but not limited to construction of infiltration or filtration basins and devices, reforestation, revegetation, <del>and</del> stormwater detention or redirection, <u>and internal sediment load management.</u></p>
Need	<p>Minnehaha Creek is listed as an impaired water for multiple parameters, including fecal coliform bacteria, chloride, low dissolved oxygen, and fish and macroinvertebrate communities. Further, due to the sediment and nutrient loads transported by Minnehaha Creek, downstream receiving waterbody Lake Hiawatha is impaired for excess nutrients, and, along with Minnehaha Creek, has an approved Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study.</p> <p>The Minnehaha Creek-Lake Hiawatha TMDL report identifies the need to reduce phosphorus and bacterial (E. coli) loading to meet water quality targets for Lake Hiawatha and Minnehaha Creek. The TMDL draft report calls for a reduction of 1,907 lbs/year throughout the subwatershed in order for Lake Hiawatha to meet an in-lake nutrient concentration of 50 ug/L. The TMDL draft report also identifies a need to reduce bacterial (E. coli) loading in order to meet the standard of 126 organisms/100 ml. At this time with our current understanding, the best approaches for addressing excess bacteria loads appear to be source reduction or volume control practices.</p> <p>In addition, the 2003 and 2012 Minnehaha Creek Stream Assessment(s) identified two major issues impacting water quality and biotic integrity in the Creek: flashy storm event flows that often result in streambank erosion; and low base flows, which reduce habitat and limit biotic integrity. The high percent of impervious surface in this urbanized subwatershed has reduced the amount of stormwater that naturally infiltrates to surficial groundwater and which helps sustain base flow. This stormwater is efficiently conveyed to the creek through stormsewers, which results in the flashy flows.</p> <p><u>Previous diagnostic and water quality studies within the Minnehaha Creek subwatershed indicate that internal sediment phosphorus release is a substantial contributor to water quality in select lakes, including Cedar Lake and Lake Nokomis. In these systems, legacy phosphorus stored in bottom sediments can continue to drive algal blooms and reduced water clarity even after watershed nutrient inputs are reduced. Internal load management represents a potential long-term strategy to address these internal nutrient sources in conjunction with upstream work.</u></p> <p>Specific project locations and methods will be identified and implemented to reduce nutrient and bacterial loading to Minnehaha Creek and thus to Lake Hiawatha; decrease peak discharge rates in Minnehaha Creek to reduce streambank erosion; and increase baseflow in the Creek to improve its biotic integrity. These projects are intended to reduce annual volume and peak flows discharged to the Creek; increase infiltration to surficial groundwater; and reduce nutrient and bacterial export to the Creek.</p> <p>Identifying specific implementation sites under this capital project element will be an ongoing process informed by refined technical knowledge of pollutant sources and geomorphological phenomena, available land and willing public or private partners. Priorities are set foremost by diagnosing the spatial distribution of pollutant loading to Minnehaha Creek.</p>

<b>Outcome</b>	Improve ecological integrity of the stream corridor through this reach; improve stream channel stabilization; intercept and remove storm sewer outfalls; address existing stormwater management issues; minimize new pollutant loads conveyed by runoff and generated within Minnehaha Creek; minimize new volumes generated by new development; protect stream base flows and wetland and surficial groundwater hydrology; enhance riparian habitat and native vegetative communities; <a href="#">work with district partners to address internal loading due to legacy phosphorus.</a>
<b>Estimated Cost and Potential Funding Sources</b>	\$2,450,000; District levy, partner contributions, grant opportunities
<b>Schedule</b>	2018-2027