



Title:	Authorization to Distribute Minor Plan Amendment	
Resolution Number:	26-023	
Prepared by:	Rachel Baker Phone: (952) 471-0590 rbaker@minnehahacreek.org	
Reviewed by:	Michael Hayman, Director of Project Planning; Chuck Holtman, Smith Partners	
Recommended action:	Authorize District Administrator to distribute proposed minor plan amendment	
Schedule:	February 12, 2026: Authorize distribution of minor plan amendment March 12, 2026: Committee Meeting - Cedar Lake Management Unit Plan Update March 12, 2026: Board Meeting - Public Hearing for minor plan amendment March 26, 2026: Adoption of minor plan amendment	
Past Board actions:	Res #: 24-028	Authorization to Execute a Cooperative Agreement with the City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and Release the Request for Proposals for the Minnehaha Parkway Phase I Project Feasibility Study

Summary

MCWD staff propose 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.

This action does not authorize project implementation or funding, but rather ensures that potential internal load management strategies are appropriately reflected in MCWD's approved planning framework. The Board will receive a full briefing on the contents of the Cedar Lake MU Plan and an update on the Minneapolis Thriving Waters Partnership at the Operations and Programs Committee (OPC) meeting on March 12, 2026.

Background

In 2024, the City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (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 amendments to 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 the severity of water quality issues 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.

Minor Plan Amendment

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.

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 the District'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 if the internal sediment management project is successful in receiving grant funds.

The proposed Minor Plan Amendment adds internal nutrient load management as a potential implementation plan within the Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed's Stormwater Volume and Pollutant Load Reduction capital improvement program (CIP) entry. 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.

Approval to distribute the Minor Plan Amendment is requested at this time due to changes in the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) grant timelines. Adjustments to the grant cycle include transitioning from an annual program to a biennium cycle, and the open application window transitioning from the summer months to February and March. These adjustments require earlier initiation of planning actions than originally anticipated. MCWD is committed to being flexible and remaining responsive to partner needs and evolving funding opportunities, while maintaining Board oversight throughout the process.

Next Steps

Following authorization to distribute the Minor Plan Amendment draft to review authorities and partner agencies, MCWD staff will distribute the proposed amendment in accordance with statute and provide for notice of a public meeting as a part of the March 12 Board meeting agenda, to receive comment on the amendment. Staff does not expect the amendment to prompt substantial comment and accordingly would intend to present the amendment for Board approval at its March 26 meeting. In addition, MCWD staff will continue working with MPRB and the City of Minneapolis to complete the Cedar Lake Management Unit Plan in early 2026. The MU Plan will support MPRB's efforts to strengthen its application for Clean Water Fund grants, and inform future updates to partner capital improvement plans.

MCWD staff anticipate presenting a more detailed briefing on the Cedar Lake MU Plan scope and schedule as well as an update on the Minneapolis Thriving Waters Partnership at the March 12, 2026 OPC meeting.

Supporting Documents:

- Attachment 1: Draft Watershed Management Plan minor amendment



RESOLUTION

Resolution number: 26-023

Title: Authorization to Distribute Minor Plan Amendment

- WHEREAS the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) adopted its 2017 Watershed Management Plan (WMP) to guide the District's long-range planning, policies, and implementation strategies for protecting and improving water resources within the watershed;
- WHEREAS in 2024, MCWD, the City of Minneapolis, and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) through a Cooperative Agreement formed the Minneapolis Thriving Waters Partnership to coordinate planning, funding, and implementation of water resource projects that improve water quality and enhance community benefits within Minneapolis;
- WHEREAS as part of the Minneapolis Thriving Waters Partnership, the partners are developing a series of Management Unit (MU) plans to inform mid-range project implementation and long-term watershed planning, with the Cedar Lake Management Unit Plan serving as the first of these efforts and a model for future planning across the Chain of Lakes subwatershed;
- WHEREAS the Cedar Lake Management Unit Plan will document water quality conditions, identify key nutrient drivers, and evaluate potential strategies to address both external watershed inputs and internal nutrient loading;
- WHEREAS MPRB has expressed interest in pursuing external funding, including Clean Water Fund (CWF) grants administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), to support internal lake nutrient load management strategies for Cedar Lake;
- WHEREAS eligibility and competitiveness for CWF grant funding require that proposed projects be included in an approved water management plan;
- WHEREAS MCWD has discussed with partners leading development of the Cedar Lake Management Unit Plan, supporting amendments to the District's Watershed Management Plan as needed, and serving as a fiscal agent for potential state grant funds, while MPRB would lead grant applications and project implementation;
- WHEREAS in accordance with discussion of existing condition drivers and management strategies in the Minnehaha Creek subwatershed plan, the proposed Minor Plan Amendment would add internal nutrient load management as a potential action within the Subwatershed implementation plan;
- WHEREAS inclusion in the implementation plan does not commit MCWD to project implementation, or funding, or any specific project timeline;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Board of Managers authorizes MCWD staff to distribute the proposed amendment to the 2017 Watershed Management Plan to applicable review authorities and partner agencies for review and comment, and to schedule a public meeting on the proposed amendment for the March 12, 2026 Board meeting, in accordance with Minnesota Rules 8410.

Resolution Number 26-023 was moved by Manager _____, seconded by Manager _____.
Motion to adopt the resolution ___ ayes, ___ nays, _____ abstentions. Date: February 12, 2026.

_____ Date: _____ Secretary

Table 3.12 Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed CIP

Project	Stormwater Volume and Pollutant Load Reduction
Description	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, and stormwater detention or redirection, <u>and internal sediment load management.</u>
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>

Outcome	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; work with district partners to address internal loading due to legacy phosphorus.
Estimated Cost and Potential Funding Sources	\$2,450,000; District levy, partner contributions, grant opportunities
Schedule	2018-2027