



Wednesday, November 12, 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 Sando

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Present:

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

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:

John Iverson

MCWD Staff Members Present: Samantha Hoppe, James O'Brien

6:30 pm

1. **Committee Meeting Call to Order**
2. **Approval of Agenda** (*Additions/Corrections/Deletions*)
2.1 November 12, 2025 agenda
Schaefer, Nyquist. All approved.
3. **Approval of Minutes** (*Additions/Corrections/Deletions*)
3.1 September 17, 2025 minutes
Jiwani, Bonner. All approved.
4. **Action Items**
No action items.

6:40 pm

5. **Discussion Items**
5.1 Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Engagement – **O'Brien**
O'Brien provided an overview of the evening's presentation, focused on sharing updates and collecting feedback from the CAC on MCWD's progress on its DEI Workplan and the draft Inclusive Engagement Framework. He noted that the CAC would be using Mentimeter to capture initial feedback before discussion.

O'Brien introduced the concepts of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as they relate to MCWD's mission. He noted that MCWD considers DEI work in the context of its [Balanced Urban Ecology](#) (BUE) philosophy, as the foundation for understanding communities as living organisms with dynamic needs, interests, and a wide range of perspectives. O'Brien walked through a brief timeline of MCWD's efforts in the DEI space. After several years of project implementation grounded in integrated planning, the social justice movement of 2020 injected

new energy into dedicated DEI efforts for the organization. In 2023, MCWD developed its DEI Framework and Workplan, grounded in analyses of DEI policies, plans, and frameworks of other, similar organizations. The DEI Framework and Workplan identify three key areas of opportunity for MCWD to implement more equitable and inclusive practices into its approach and operations:

1. Operations
2. Policy and Projects
3. Outreach and Engagement

O'Brien framed key deliverables under each of these work areas. Within the Operations area, staff are developing an Onboarding Framework to promote inclusivity and belonging for new staff members. He then provided a brief review of the Equity Lens, which serves as a tool to inform policy and project decision-making and process design. The Equity Lens helps clarify the desired outcomes of a project or policy, analyze data to understand the historical or contemporary community context, identify unique community benefits and burdens, and enhance community collaboration by leveraging data insights to inform engagement and evaluation practices.

O'Brien then framed how the Equity Lens would be applied to capital projects, with consistent evaluation conducted throughout every step of the multi-year process. O'Brien also reviewed CAC feedback received at the March 2025 CAC meeting on the Equity Lens; CAC members

- Noted that the Lens should be thoughtfully integrated into existing MCWD workflows, so it can be proactively and efficiently integrated.
- Cautioned against turning the Lens into a simple checklist that lacks the nuance and tailoring necessary to inform any given initiative.
- Recognized that staff need to be cognizant of how data can be manipulated and misinterpreted, and ensure that a robust Quality Assurance and Quality Control process is undertaken before data is leveraged.
- Suggested that the Lens must consider how a project or policy could have unintended consequences, and work to address these to the extent possible.

O'Brien then shared how CAC feedback and further team evaluation have informed updates to the equity lens. Some key updates included a separation of lenses, creating a different list of questions for capital projects and one for policies, to ensure a more tailored and relevant approach based on the differing processes and outcomes between capital projects and policies. Additionally, the lens has been further refined and streamlined to promote a more user-friendly and practical application to existing workflows.

O'Brien then shared an overview of the items within the outreach focus area of the DEI workplan: An Inclusive Engagement Framework, Engagement Toolkit, and Language Access Plan (LAP). He noted the general purpose and scope of each resource but highlighted that the Inclusive Engagement Framework would be the focus of discussion. The Inclusive Engagement Framework will serve as a guidance document outlining MCWD's overarching public engagement strategy, as well as key themes based on industry best practices in DEI engagement, and a standard workflow for better integrating DEI principles into MCWD's outreach efforts. The Language Access Plan and Engagement Toolkit will supplement the

Framework by providing standards for translation and interpretation, and tactics, templates, and other tools for more inclusive engagement. O'Brien noted that the Engagement Framework will leverage the socioeconomic and community composition data gathered from the Equity Lens analysis to inform engagement strategies.

A CAC member asked how MCWD is approaching engagement with tribal governments. O'Brien and Hoppe noted that MCWD is currently coordinating with numerous Tribal Liaisons from around the Twin Cities to identify the appropriate pathway for indigenous community engagement, and are using the 2027 Watershed Management Plan update as an entry point to build long-term relationships and understanding with that community.

Another CAC member asked about recruitment efforts and actions taken to diversify the representation on MCWD's Board, staff, and CAC, a comment mentioned at the March CAC meeting. O'Brien and Hoppe noted that efforts to increase diverse representation continue to be a priority for the District, however, it is a process that takes time and dedicated effort. A CAC member reflected on the limited applicant pool for the 2026 CAC appointment cycle and expressed interest in a more concentrated effort to promote diversity within the CAC. CAC members reflected on challenges and successes that they've experienced in recruiting new, diverse members to various boards and organizations.

A CAC member reflected on Hennepin County's efforts to use [trusted messengers](#) to advocate for public engagement and involvement among diverse communities. O'Brien noted that the approach was a common theme among other organizations seeking to diversify public participation, and noted that the Engagement Framework is aimed at connecting MCWD with diverse constituencies authentically and holistically.

Executive Officer Nyquist made a motion to develop a task force to help increase the diversity of the CAC and expand annual recruitment efforts. CAC member Goldsmith seconded. CAC members engaged in a discussion regarding the task force and the current recruitment responsibilities of CAC members. Upon completion of the discussion, Chair Glisky requested a vote in approval of the task force. All members voted in favor of the motion; none opposed. O'Brien noted he'd share an invitation for interested members to get involved with this task force in the meeting follow-up communications.

O'Brien thanked the CAC for their interest and discussion. He then encouraged the CAC to sign in to Mentimeter and provide feedback on a few discussion questions related to inclusive engagement. CAC members shared examples of strong engagement processes they participated in, including the Long Lake Waters public meeting in October, the City of Mound Parks Initiative's engagement, and Hennepin County tabling, among others. Common themes included offering multiple ways to provide feedback, creating space for perspectives to be shared openly, meeting people where they're at, and finding appropriate locations that are relevant and accessible to the community. A CAC member noted that it is helpful for residents to learn more about the project process, MCWD's focused approach, and the capacity and time needed to deliver projects that achieve significant, lasting results for the watershed.

CAC members were also asked to provide examples of poor public engagement processes that they have participated in, as well as what methods or practices could have improved those input opportunities. CAC members reflected on the importance of two-way communication and active listening and also noted examples of people re-enforcing decisions based on fear rather than community input.

O'Brien transitioned back to a presentation outlining recent work and progress on the Inclusive Engagement Framework. He started by providing a brief review of MCWD's Outreach approach and how the District uses the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum to design effective engagement. A CAC member asked about examples of the Empower category and when that level of engagement would be used.

O'Brien then shared how MCWD approached its discovery process to inform an Engagement Framework. Staff looked at plans and practices across 35 different organizations, seven of which were within the watershed itself. Across these plans, language access was a dominant theme throughout; however, many plans lacked specific action steps and accountability measures. Overall, staff identified 8 key themes of practice for more inclusive and equitable engagement. These 8 key themes included:

1. Engaging trusted community leaders to serve as advocates and foster strong community relationships.
2. Building cultural competency to support communications that resonate, avoid tokenism, and authentically celebrate diversity.
3. Enhancing recruitment efforts for advisory committees to encourage diverse community involvement.
4. Reducing socioeconomic, cultural, or other barriers to participating in engagement events.
5. Institutionalizing language access standards.
6. Leveraging data to tailor engagement efforts to specific audiences.
7. Utilizing culturally-relevant media to target specific audiences, enhance inclusion, and deliver relevant messaging.
8. Expanding the organization's digital footprint to reach broader audiences.

O'Brien stepped through some preliminary recommendations based on the discovery process, which would be documented within the Engagement Framework. Examples included expanding translation and interpretation services, reaching out to community leaders and organizations in a targeted manner, broader meeting notifications, offering refreshments and accommodations at public meetings, locating meetings strategically, and seeking to remove barriers to whatever extent possible. He also noted that a core component of inclusive engagement involves sharing and reflecting on feedback received. CAC meeting members also suggested taping strong presentations and distributing them to increase reach while managing staff capacity. They also emphasized the importance of plain language and simple messaging to reach new audiences.

A CAC member suggested engaging schools and educational institutions by sharing videos or other adaptable classroom resources, and by partnering with leaders in the field—such as Three Rivers Parks District naturalists or the Minnesota Zoo, which members noted is currently leading a major water-quality project. CAC members also emphasized the importance of communicating the

impact of MCWD's work to broaden awareness and generate interest. CAC members suggested using QR codes or other technology to help capture feedback and metrics efficiently.

O'Brien closed with a final question about how members know when an organization has done "enough" engagement. CAC members shared a range of perspectives, noting that there is rarely a clear metric or endpoint. Some reflected that engagement can feel sufficient when community discussion begins to quiet after a period of strong interest or concern, or when there is no longer visible opposition to a project. Others emphasized the importance of setting realistic goals and recognizing when additional input is unlikely to change the project any further. Members also highlighted that the most meaningful indicator of successful engagement is when a project feels like the community's idea—not just the organization's.

8:38 pm

6. Informational Items + Updates

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- Nyquist noted that the CAC is a strong group, and he's excited about the potential for the task force to help with diversifying the CAC members.
- Schaefer thanked the MCWD staff team for supporting the LLWA public meeting on behalf of the Cities of Orono, Long Lake, and Medina.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- Manager Sando thanked CAC members for their time and energy.
- Manager Sando also shared an update on the upcoming acquisition of land at [6300 Painter Road](#) in Minnetrista for future project implementation in the Painter Creek subwatershed, to benefit Jennings and Harrison's Bay on Lake Minnetonka.

6.3 Staff Updates

O'Brien provided updates on CAC appointment and recruitment, the 2027 Watershed Management Plan (Plan), capital projects, and dam operations:

- 2026 CAC Appointment and Recruitment Process: The CAC recruitment process ended on October 20th, and the Board is preparing to appoint two new CAC members for 2026 at one of the December meetings.
- Watershed Management Plan Updates: Staff have recently completed annual coordination meetings with the District's member communities. These meetings were utilized as a soft rollout of the Plan messaging and major themes. Insights from these meetings have helped refine messaging ahead of the Plan kick-off, which is scheduled for January 27, 2026, at the Minnetonka Community Center. The kick-off will include two events, one morning and one evening, to accommodate attendees' schedules. The annual meetings have also provided insight into needed shifts for the upcoming TAC and PAC engagement process. Staff will ensure this process reflects the unique characteristics of communities while focusing on integrated planning approaches. Additionally, consultation with Smith Partners is informing a focused approach to community engagement in areas of past investment by the District, as a component of the broader Plan engagement process. CAC members were also thanked for their feedback on the draft Plan kick-off publication, which has since been refined in preparation for sending ahead of the kick-off event.
- Capital Project Updates: MCWD Board of Managers accepted the results of the [Statewide Carp Management Effectiveness Study](#). With the report finalized, MCWD will be working to develop its own resource to support its broader lake management approach. The Lake Management Framework will draw on the study's findings, along with other statewide guidance, to explain

how in-lake management strategies, like carp management, are part of MCWD's holistic management approach, which prioritizes addressing a lake's watershed load before in-lake management, to generate meaningful benefits and long-term restoration.

- Water Levels and Gray's Bay Dam Operations: In accordance with its operating plan, Grays Bay Dam was closed on October 17th as Lake Minnetonka reached its natural runout elevation of 928.6 feet. As of November 7th, the Twin Cities have received 27.2 inches of precipitation, which is more than 2 inches below normal for this time of year, according to the National Weather Service. On November 12th, Lake Minnetonka was recorded at 928.45 feet, and Minnehaha Creek flowed at 15.6 cubic feet per second (cfs) at the Hiawatha Avenue gauge.

8:59 pm

7. **Adjournment**

Goldsmith, Wallace, All approved.

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, January 14, 2026, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting (Manager Maxwell: Board Liaison)