



Wednesday, July 15, 2026

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

MCWD Boardroom

www.minnehahacreek.org

Board of Managers:

Sherry White, President; William Olson, Vice President; Eugene Maxwell, Treasurer; Ricardo Bonner, Manager; Arun Hejmadi, Secretary; Steve Sando, Manager; Janet Schaefer, Manager

Board Liaisons: Manager Maxwell; President White

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Present:

Cait Caswell, Joshua Foschi, Robert Glisky, Steve Hage, John Iverson, Drew McGovern, Will Mulhern, Sheri Wallace

Citizens Advisory Committee Members Absent:

Laurie Goldsmith, John Iverson, Rich Nyquist

MCWD Staff Present:

Becky Christopher, 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 15, 2026 agenda
Wallace, Jiwani. All approved.
3. **Approval of Minutes (Additions/Corrections/Deletions)**
3.1 May 20, 2026 minutes
Foschi, Mulhern. All approved.
4. **Action Items**
No action items.

6:35 pm

5. **Discussion Items**
5.1 2027 Draft Budget & Capital Improvement Plan – **Christopher**
Policy Planning Director, Becky Christopher, introduced the 2027 preliminary budget for CAC discussion by reviewing the budget process. The Board kicked off the budget process in May and has continued to refine the budget in Committee while staff draft the 2027 budget publication. CAC budget review is a key milestone of the process each year in July, after which the Board may have another Committee discussion focused on refinements before hosting its public hearing on the budget at the August 27, 2026, Board meeting. Pending feedback and further refinement, the Board will adopt the budget and certify the levy in September. In November, the public has a final chance to share comments on the 2027 budget.

Christopher summarized the budget at a high level, noting MCWD is projecting a \$15 million budget which is a 7% budget increase from 2026, but in line with typical fluctuations seen year-to-year as projects and initiatives advance through various stages. Despite this fluctuation, MCWD anticipates a flat levy in 2027, contributing \$9.8 million. MCWD has increased its levy only once, by 2%, since 2018, by running a lean operation and transferring unspent funds into capital reserves to support future project implementation. Grants and partner funds have increased 13% in 2027 with state grants to support the 2027 Plan process, as well as local contributions and watershed-based implementation funding (WBIF) to support capital projects. For 2027, permit fees will remain flat and interest earnings are projected to increase slightly, due to the increase in the fund balance.

Christopher then stepped through the major expense areas in the 2027 draft budget. Operations expenditures are down approximately 23% in 2027 as the campus improvement project was moved into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), offsetting an increase in the IT budget as MCWD prepares to replace servers. Overall program expenses are up about 4%, driven by Project Planning program expenses as MCWD takes on focal geography planning initiatives, increases in vegetation management contract expenses; as well as a Policy Planning budget increase to support the 2027 Plan process; and Outreach expenses as the program allocates funding to host the 2027 Minnesota Watersheds Summer Tour. Debt Service is essentially remaining flat and may decrease over the next few years. Debt is used strategically by the Board to help minimize levy volatility and spread-out project expenses benefiting future generations. Capital Projects is up 22%, representing about half of the budget annually, as MCWD seeks to implement a growing portfolio of high-impact projects across focal geographies.

Christopher then introduced MCWD's 2027 draft Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), which is currently out for review by the watershed's communities. She stepped through a series of maps detailing active projects in the 2027 CIP within each focal geography, as well as those supported through the District's Land & Water Partnership (LWP) program.

Starting with LWP program projects, Christopher explained four projects are currently in the budget as completed or wrapping up in 2027. These include the Morningside Ravine Stabilization, led by the City of Medina, which was mostly completed last year but is finishing corrective work in 2026; the Calvary Church stormwater management project in Deephaven which is starting construction in 2026; the Northside Park project in St. Louis Park which is complete, but shows a final payment for long-term maintenance in 2026; and finally, Holbrook Park Stormwater Project in Long Lake, which has evolved into a state grant-funded feasibility study to assess stormwater project opportunities in Long Lake's downtown area. However, this project is now being led by MCWD's project team and has spurred the decision to make the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed a focal geography in MCWD's 2027 Plan.

In the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay Subwatershed, MCWD recently completed the East Auburn Wetland restoration, which will be moving into the warranty phase in 2027. The Turbid-Lundsten Corridor wetland restoration is slated for construction next year, assuming MCWD and its partners can secure land rights.

In the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed, MCWD recently completed the County Road 6 Stormwater Pond Retrofit, now in the warranty phase, and has several upcoming projects moving into design in 2027, such as the Downtown Long Lake stormwater projects identified through the feasibility study, as well as in-lake restoration in upstream lakes within the Subwatershed, to benefit downstream Long Lake and Tanager Bay.

In the Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed, MCWD has two implementation areas: the Minnehaha Creek Greenway and the Minneapolis area, where MCWD has forged the Minneapolis Thriving Waters Partnership (MTWP) with the City and Park Board. In the Greenway, two projects are in active construction, and will be completed late this year and early next. These include the Gateway to the Greenway, which is an expansion of Cottageville Park, and the Greenway-Cedar Trail Connection. This past winter, MCWD also dredged Twin Lakes Park Pond in St. Louis Park, which improves water quality in Twin Lakes and downstream Cedar Lake, supporting future projects for Cedar Lake, such as an alum treatment and retrofit of adjacent stormwater facilities to improve the headwaters of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes. Further downstream, MCWD anticipates starting design of the first MWTP project at Cedar Ave along Minnehaha Parkway late this year and has slated maintenance dredging for the Amelia Stormwater Pond near Lake Nokomis.

After completing the overview of MCWD's 2027 CIP, Christopher welcomed CAC questions and discussion on the 2027 budget, process, and project portfolio.

CAC members re-enforced the main areas the public will be interested in are whether MCWD will increase its levy and how it determines priorities. CAC members then discussed MCWD's project priorities, noting that the public may value stronger evaluations of project investments in focal geographies, to determine how much progress expenditures in these areas have yielded in adjacent and downstream waters. Christopher noted this is a key focus area of the 2027 Plan, as MCWD seeks to develop an evaluation framework to better track progress over time and communicate the impact of MCWD's work. CAC members discussed the background of MCWD's focal geography approach, reflecting this approach is driven by data and focuses MCWD's attention in areas of highest water resource need and opportunity, where there is strong community support and opportunities for partnership. CAC members reflected it can be hard for residents to see tangible water quality benefits, especially downstream. Hoppe framed an ongoing study of water quality perceptions in Twin Cities lakes and noted the visible improvements residents are looking for don't always align with the water quality data collected.

CAC members also asked about how MCWD's levy compares to other watersheds, and how the Board is considering levy increases long-term, as the District receives more pressure to lead project implementation. Christopher explained MCWD's budget and levy is within the range of what's seen across other metro watersheds of similar scale and noted the flat levy has been a product of strategic alignment and running a lean operation, allowing MCWD to grow reserves to support project implementation. President White and Manager Maxwell noted this has been a topic of conversation for the Board as the organization considers scaling, and the Board hopes to manage the organization's growth carefully to avoid significant levy volatility.

CAC members then discussed the MPCA's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) framework for influencing watershed and community priorities. Christopher explained this was a topic of discussion at the last Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting for the 2027 Plan. TAC members discussed the progress their communities are making toward TMDLs and shared challenges and limitations with the system. In many cases, cities are doing the minimum to meet their Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permits and TMDL reporting requirements, but few are leading large-scale, proactive projects. This discussion highlighted the opportunity for MCWD to help define clear water resource priorities and identify project opportunities for shared implementation.

CAC members also asked about past work to track the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS), and about the LWP program from a budget perspective. Christopher provided some background on MCWD's past AIS work and explained MCWD's strategic pivot from that space, noting many other actors have active programs and unfortunately once AIS are introduced there are few strategies to stop their spread. She also explained that MCWD has money dedicated for technical support through the LWP program and preserves flexibility to make budget amendments outside of the regular cycle if strong projects request funding assistance. CAC members also suggested MCWD consider creating an endowment to supplement its budget over time.

Hoppe then introduced the draft 2027 Budget Publication and explained changes to the publication's format this year: portrait-style layout for alignment with MCWD's annual report, different chart formats for better readability, and a slightly larger page count to provide more visual flexibility. She stepped through the publication in two-page spreads, before opening the floor for CAC feedback on key messages, readability, impact statements, and layout considerations.

CAC members appreciated the publication's new layout and visual identity, and the use of clear metrics and impact statements across the publication's featured content. CAC members also noted layout considerations to clarify permitting and LWP content and metrics, improve maps, reinforce budget connections throughout the publication, suggested text modifications in some places, and noted a few project descriptions that may benefit from additional context.

8:10 pm

6. Informational Items + Updates

6.1 CAC Member Updates

- Chair Glisky shared a brief update on the DEI Task Force's recent work to understand watershed demographics in context of MCWD's DEI Framework, and how the Task Force will be starting to support 2027 CAC recruitment.
- Chair Glisky shared the Executive Committee is planning to complete a draft of the Engagement Guidelines to share for CAC feedback before they are adopted in November, to support new member onboarding and outline expectations for being an effective member inside and outside of meetings.
- Hoppe reminded the CAC that the 2027 recruitment cycle will be starting in September, when the application is posted to MCWD's website. CAC members are encouraged to share the application through their networks and help MCWD recruitment a strong pool of candidates to serve.
- Hoppe shared CAC logo wear has arrived for those who placed orders.

6.2 Board Liaison Updates

- President White shared an update on the establishment of MCWD's Governance Advisory Council, which will support the Board of Managers as it

navigates a period of organizational transition. The Council includes two former Board members and two MCWD advisors. They will be engaging in onboarding conversations with new Board members and advising on strategic and policy issues affecting the organization long-term. President White also noted the Board will be engaging in their first retreat on Friday, July 31st to discuss governance culture and goals.

- Manager Maxwell shared MCWD has awarded a contract to start construction on the Greenway – Cedar Trail Connection project in the coming weeks and noted construction is already underway at the Gateway to the Greenway, which will expand Cottageville Park as a western entrance to the Greenway.
- President White shared the Board recently authorized an RFP for a feasibility study analyzing project opportunities to reduce pollutant loading in Halsted Bay, the most degraded lake within MCWD. This work will build on MCWD's past investments upstream in the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay Subwatershed, and determine what strategies may support measurable, long-term improvements in that system, based on progress made to-date.

6.3 Staff Updates

- Christopher and Hoppe shared a brief update on the recent TAC meeting regarding community water resource priorities and planning efforts. They noted the discussion was prompted with results from a pre-meeting survey where TAC members were asked to share their organization's water resource goals, activities, budgets, and planning, resulting in a meaningful discussion of challenges and future opportunities. MCWD also used the meeting to introduce its 2D watershed model, which will be used throughout the 2027 Plan process and produce a new flood risk assessment examining current and future flood risk to help communities plan for the future, together.
- Hoppe conveyed MCWD is in a dynamic phase on the personnel front, with a new Planner-Project Manager and Permitting Assistant starting in August, the recent return of former Administrative Services Manager, Tessa Vacek, and the active hiring process to backfill an Outreach Coordinator.
- Hoppe invited Irvin to share a brief water level update, as she has taken on Gray's Bay Dam operations given recent staff transition. Irvin shared water levels are low given the watershed's recent dry weather. Lake Minnetonka's level was recorded at 929.11 ft on July 15th, 2026, and Minnehaha Creek was recorded flowing just 35.9 cubic feet per second (cfs). If the dry forecast continues, water levels are expected to continue declining, and there is a strong chance MCWD could return to a "abnormally dry" designation from the U.S. Drought Monitor.
- Finally, Hoppe explained that given staff and some CAC member absences projected for September's scheduled CAC meeting date, it may be prudent to consider rescheduling that meeting. She also noted potential conflict with an upcoming Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting in September and stated she will follow up to poll other potential absences before initiating rescheduling, potentially to a later week in September.

8:30 pm

7. **Adjournment** **Jiwani, Caswell. All approved.**

Upcoming Meeting

Wednesday, September 16, 2026, Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting*

*Meeting date may be rescheduled at the discretion of the Board, staff, and CAC.