MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT
QUALITY OF WATER, QUALITY OF LIFE

Meeting: Operations and Programs Committee
Meeting date: 3/26/2026
Agenda Item #: 4.1
Item type: Discussion

Title: Downtown Long Lake Feasibility and LLC Implementation Plan Update

Prepared by: Name: Rachel Baker, Michael Hayman
Phone: 952-641-4522, 952-471-8226
rbaker@minnehahacreek.org, mhayman@minnehahacreek.org

Purpose: At the March 26, 2026 Planning and Policy Committee (PPC) meeting, staff will provide an overview of the Downtown Long Lake Feasibility Study findings and present a multi-pronged engagement and implementation strategy for the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed.

Background:
Since 2018, the cities of Long Lake, Medina, and Orono; Long Lake Waters Association (LLWA); and Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) have been working together towards a common goal of improving water quality within the Long Lake Creek Subwatershed. This effort will help the cities meet state load reduction requirements for the five impaired lakes in the system and ensure that area lakes are swimmable and fishable.

On request of the LLWA, MCWD took on the role of convener and technical lead in 2018. With the support of the partners, MCWD obtained state grant funding and led a subwatershed assessment to provide a strong scientific understanding of the system, identify cost-effective projects and strategies, and develop a clear and actionable roadmap to implement them.

Between 2019-2020, MCWD conducted the assessment and worked with the partners to identify and evaluate a variety of potential watershed improvement projects. In late 2020, staff developed an Implementation Roadmap Preview and presented it to the Board and each of the three city councils to introduce the findings, recommendations, and near-term priorities that came out of the subwatershed assessment. This allowed the partnership to start building council understanding, gauge partner support, and continue to develop the full roadmap.

In January 2023, MCWD staff produced a final report referred to as the Long Lake Creek Roadmap (Roadmap). The Roadmap identified 34 projects for advancement based on their cost-effectiveness and feasibility to implement. To categorize and prioritize these projects, a three-tiered strategy was developed, which includes (1) regional stormwater treatment, (2) landscape projects, and (3) internal load management.

To support early implementation of the Roadmap priorities, MCWD led the design and construction of a retrofit to an existing stormwater facility near County Road 6, just upstream of Long Lake. The project expands the two-cell system and adds a sand filtration bench to enhance water treatment performance. These improvements increase the pond's capacity to treat runoff from the surrounding area before it reaches Long Lake. Construction of the retrofit began in January 2026.

Downtown Long Lake Feasibility Study:
In the downtown Long Lake area, the Roadmap identified the need for improved and additional regional treatment and recommended exploring opportunities at Holbrook Park, Nelson Lakeside Park, and other publicly-owned properties. In 2023, with the support of the partnership, MCWD applied for and received $174,940 from the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to conduct a feasibility study for Holbrook Park to identify potential regional treatment locations, costs, and benefits. However, following a preliminary site assessment with the city, staff identified an opportunity to broaden the feasibility study to include the downtown area of Long Lake, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation of both Roadmap-identified sites and newly identified opportunities.

At the May 20, 2025 Long Lake City Council Meeting, MCWD staff presented an overview of the partnership history, Roadmap, and proposed feasibility study. The City accepted the Roadmap, expressed support for the ongoing partnership, and supported MCWD's plans to conduct a more robust feasibility study in the downtown Long Lake area.

After distributing a Request for Proposals and running an interview and selection process, MCWD selected HDR to complete the feasibility study. HDR, partnering with landscape architecture firm Damon Farber, structured the feasibility study around evaluating potential stormwater management concepts against criteria such as water quality benefit, ecological value, community value, constructability, permitting complexity, and funding potential.

A key step early in the study effort was a half-day design charrette amongst the project team – MCWD staff, Long Lake staff, and the consultant engineers and landscape architects – to provide an opportunity to collaboratively develop and refine design directions. The consultant team then developed schematic-level designs, permitting assessments, operations and maintenance recommendations, and engineer's opinions of probable cost and model-based water quality benefit estimates for each recommended concept. This effort will culminate in a project implementation plan with clear, actionable recommendations for advancing priority projects toward detailed design and construction.

Long Lake Creek Subwatershed Engagement and Implementation Next Steps:
With the Downtown Long Lake feasibility study nearing completion, MCWD is actively working to translate its findings into a coordinated implementation strategy and to align partner cities around a clear path forward. Staff are preparing a project implementation plan that will outline priorities and timelines across three interconnected tracks: downtown Long Lake stormwater projects, upper watershed lake interventions, and in-lake management of Long Lake itself through internal sediment treatment. The plan will inform partner engagement over the coming months and provide a framework for funding strategies, partnership agreements, and project sequencing.

Summary:
At the March 26, 2026 PPC meeting, staff, along with the design consultant team of HDR, will present high-level findings and preliminary recommendations of the Downtown Long Lake Feasibility Study. Staff will then lead a discussion around the broader subwatershed implementation strategy, covering the potential sequence of downtown stormwater projects, upstream lake interventions, and long-term in-lake management strategies for Long Lake. Staff will also outline the engagement approach with partner cities Long Lake, Medina, and Orono, including near-term coordination steps to build toward project prioritization, funding strategies, and partnership agreements.

Supporting documents:
Attachment 1: Long Lake Creek Partnership Roadmap