



Title: Land Use Community Engagement Update

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Purpose:

At the October 22, 2026, Policy and Planning Committee (PPC), staff will provide an update on recent engagement with members of the land use community to compile insights to inform the [Minnehaha Creek Watershed District \(MCWD\)'s Land & Water Integration Strategy](#).

Background:

MCWD's [Balanced Urban Ecology](#) (BUE) philosophy recognizes that land use decisions shape water quality, runoff, flood risk, habitat, and infrastructure needs, and healthy natural systems support thriving communities. Therefore, achieving a vision of BUE requires coordination with the agencies, departments, jurisdictions, and private actors that shape the landscape.

The District's 2027 Watershed Management Plan (Plan) aims to continue building on MCWD's trajectory of demonstrated impact through Balanced Urban Ecology, built through sustained partnerships and coordinated planning. As part of the forward facing 2027 Plan, the Board adopted a scope of policy priorities that included a focus on organizing Land and Water Partnership work more deliberately, including development of a best practices and policies guide for integrating land and water planning.

Beyond policy best practices, MCWD's experience suggests that successful projects also depend on other parallel efforts that create opportunities for partnership, including understanding community objectives, building relationships, recognizing local land use decisions that are on the horizon, and engaging early enough with partners to shape alternatives.

To gather insights to inform this area of work, on [April 9, 2026, the MCWD Board of Managers authorized a contract with Smith Partners](#) to support engagement with peers and partners in the land use community. This engagement aims to build an understanding of how the land use community perceives watershed regulation and partnership, informing opportunities and refinements to better integrate land and water planning in MCWD programs in the next Plan cycle.

Engagement Process Update:

MCWD staff and Smith Partners scoped a multi-phase interview process with:

1. Other metro watershed districts to assess varying permitting and integration approaches and identify exemplars across the region.
2. Private developers, engineering consultants, and past business partners to identify lessons learned, perspectives on watershed regulation and integrated planning approaches with the private sector.
3. Regional Chambers and local economic development authorities to collect regional insights from the broader development community.

To date, staff have conducted six semi-structured interviews with peer watersheds and three interviews with private developers and engineering consultants. Approximately five interviews are in the process of being scheduled.

Preliminary findings from completed interviews have highlighted an opportunity for another phase of engagement to interview a selection of municipal partners, based on their development experience, recent case studies, and interest in land and water integration. These interviews would strengthen and clarify findings and recommendations from the other stakeholder groups, as well as provide a connection to the ongoing 2027 Plan advisory committee process with public partners.

Insights from this land use engagement initiative will support continued refinement of MCWD's Land & Water Integration Strategy and associated actions.

October 22, 2026, PPC Discussion:

At the October 22, 2026, PPC meeting, staff will provide an overview of the engagement process conducted so far, share findings from completed interviews, and invite Board discussion and reflections on preliminary insights and recommendations to further integrate land and water planning throughout the land use process.