



Title: Q3 2026 Permitting Briefing

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Purpose:

At the September 2024, Policy and Planning Committee Meeting, staff will brief the Committee on:

- The program's strategic positioning within Balanced Urban Ecology and Land and Water Partnership
- A current radar scan of active permitting work
- Initiatives underway to strengthen permitting as a proactive point of connection with the land-use community
- The path toward completion and Board consideration of a Permitting Strategic Action Plan in January 2027

Background:

Permitting is MCWD's most frequent interface with the land-use system and, as such, the Board has identified it as an important delivery mechanism for Balanced Urban Ecology and Land and Water Partnership. Each year, hundreds of permits create thousands of interactions with landowners, developers, consultants, cities, residents, and other agencies whose decisions influence water quality, flooding, habitat, infrastructure, and community development.

Those interactions also expose an inherent challenge. Land-use decisions often advance through planning, financing, site design, and political processes before watershed requirements are fully understood. When MCWD enters late, opportunities for integration narrow and regulatory requirements can become points of friction. How MCWD navigates those moments affects both natural resource outcomes and the District's credibility with the communities it serves.

Since 2024, the Permitting Program has focused on stabilizing operations, strengthening team culture, improving consistency, and rebuilding institutional knowledge. From that foundation, staff have spent time examining how the program can evolve from a strong regulatory function into a proactive platform for integrated land and water planning that upholds MCWD's standards while assisting applicants and strengthening relationships within the land-use community.

Staff have spent time internally analyzing recurring permitting friction, evaluating programmatic strengths and weaknesses, conducting interviews with developers and other metro watershed organizations, internal discussions across MCWD, and has begun outlining a strategic framework that supported by the following pillars:

- Operational Excellence
Build the systems, knowledge, tools and consistency needed to deliver a clear, credible, and high-performing program
- Clear Expectations and Transparency
Reduce avoidable conflict by making requirements, timelines, decisions and likely issues clear as early as possible
- Trusted Pathfinding
Position MCWD as trusted advisors who help applicants navigate complex interagency regulatory pathways
- Engagement and Integration Upstream of Permit Applications
Engage earlier in project conception and planning to help shape projects before expectations and economics are locked
- Policy Alignment
Continuously evaluate and refine rules, guidance and process, to remain clear, and aligned with mission outcomes

September 24th, 2026, PPC Meeting:

Staff will organize its briefing around three connected areas:

1. Strategic Positioning

Refresh the Committee on the strategic work completed since the 2025 quarterly briefings and the emerging vision for permitting as a front door to MCWD's Land and Water Partnership approach.

2. Permitting Radar

Highlight selected active projects and use them as practical examples of the dynamics shaping permitting.

3. Strategic Initiatives

Preview work underway to expand the program's reach and effectiveness, including engagement with the regional land-use community, statewide leadership through MN Watersheds, pilot development of a land-use and permitting radar, continued integration with Land and Water Partnership, and completion of the Permitting Strategic Action Plan for Board consideration in January 2027.

This work represents the next stage in the program's development: moving from stabilization toward deliberate strategic positioning, stronger external relationships, earlier engagement in land-use decisions, and a clearer role in advancing MCWD's broader mission.

Considerations for Committee Discussion:

- Does the emerging position of permitting as a front door to Land and Water Partnership align with the Board's expectations for MCWD's strategic direction?
- What concepts, insights, or considerations should staff carry forward into the Strategic Action Plan?
- What concepts need further development before bringing the Strategic Action Plan to the Board in January?