



Title: Schelitzche Property Evaluation and Corridor Planning

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Purpose:

At the October 22, 2020 Policy and Programs Committee meeting, staff will provide a summary of information gathered over a 6-month due diligence period during which the Schelitzche property in the western growth area of the city of Victoria was evaluated for potential project opportunities. Staff will also provide insights into how this evaluation process has informed a broader strategy for western growth area planning that draws distinctions between advancing natural resource goals through capital project implementation, planning amid long-range development, and bolstering coordination with the city of Victoria to advance the greenway framework over the next two decades.

Background:

In May 2014, the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) Board of Managers adopted the Six Mile Creek - Halsted Bay (SMCHB) Subwatershed as a geography of strategic planning and implementation focus. In March of 2015, the City of Victoria (City) and MCWD executed a Memorandum of Understanding which identifies the mutual value both agencies find in cooperative planning, coordination across agencies on priority water resource issues, and increasing regulatory coordination to support and foster integrated water and natural resources management. Since that time, the City and District have been working collaboratively to develop plans and projects that integrate identified water resources issues and natural resource areas with local planning and development goals.

One area of strategic interest to both MCWD and the City is the 27-acre western growth area (Attachment 1). This area just west of Victoria in Laketown Township encompasses significant natural resources, including several priority areas for capital investment as identified in MCWD's Watershed Management Plan. It is also a key growth corridor for the City, guided by the orderly annexation agreement between the Cities of Chaska, Waconia and Victoria for growth into Laketown Township. The City's annexation process prioritizes development in the area as large parcels change ownership, infrastructure is expanded, and opportunities arise to build recreational access and connection.

Recognizing the shared interest in this growth area, the City and MCWD worked collaboratively through the City's Comprehensive Plan Development Process to develop the Greenway Corridor Policy (Attachment 2), a vision and set of recommendations for an interconnected greenbelt system in the city of Victoria. The Greenway Corridor Policy provides an innovative framework for integrating future capital project investment into local growth planning while leveraging each agency's unique strengths and authorities to evaluate and screen opportunities.

Schelitzche Property Evaluation:

At the February 27, 2020 Policy and Planning Committee meeting, staff presented an opportunity to evaluate potential project opportunities for a parcel in the western growth area. The owners of the property, Dan and Trudy Schelitzche, had approached MCWD and the City in December 2019 about potential development opportunities for their property. The Schelitzches requested MCWD's assistance in evaluating options given the significant extent of wetlands on the property and also sought the City's assistance in determining the timeline for development in this area. This evaluation process was formalized by a letter of intent between MCWD and the Schelitzches that set a 6-month due diligence period (April – October 2020) to evaluate the property under a range of attributes that would indicate value in acquisition.

The process to evaluate the property was guided by the framework established in the MCWD Water Resources Management Plan which aligns planning and investment in roads and infrastructure, parks and open space, community development, and natural resources. To fully consider how these needs might be integrated on this site and within the western growth area, staff worked with the city of Victoria to evaluate how the property would connect to existing infrastructure; opportunities for trail connections and use of the site as open space; the property's likely development timeline and land use; and the existing natural resources on the site as well as restoration opportunities. The integral information that has been gathered through this process positions MCWD to make an informed decision about acquisition at the close of the due diligence period.

This process has also offered clarity and direction as MCWD enters the next phase of planning work in the SMCHB subwatershed. Recent coordination and cooperative planning with the city of Victoria has identified the importance of decoupling natural resource goals that might be advanced through capital project implementation from planning around western growth area development that is likely on a timeline of 10-20 years in the future. This broader strategy for planning that draws distinctions between high-need project areas and parcels that would create linkages in corridors will define roles in advancing the greenway framework with the city and prioritize the next phase of implementation.

If there are questions in advance of the meeting, please contact Laura Domyancich-Lee at ldomyancich@minnehahacreek.org or 952.641.4582.

Supporting documents (list attachments):

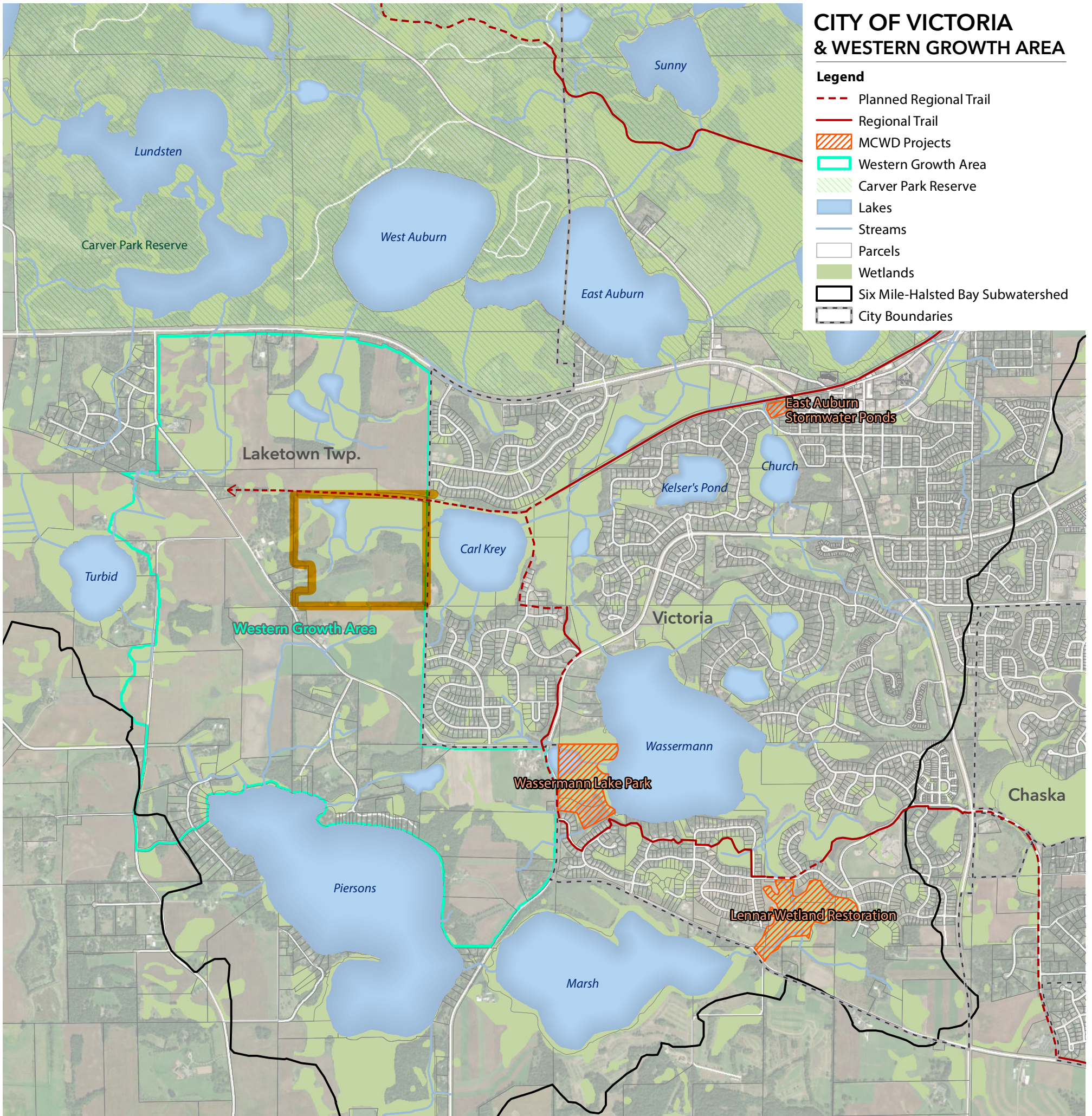
Attachment 1: Western growth area map

Attachment 2: Greenway Corridor Policy

CITY OF VICTORIA & WESTERN GROWTH AREA

Legend

- Planned Regional Trail
- Regional Trail
- MCWD Projects
- Western Growth Area
- Carver Park Reserve
- Lakes
- Streams
- Parcels
- Wetlands
- Six Mile-Halsted Bay Subwatershed
- City Boundaries



VICTORIA CHAIN OF LAKES GREENWAY

The City of Victoria is a healthy, active, and interconnected community built around abundant amenities including its lakes, parks and trails which create a place where people want to live, work and play.

Victoria's success, as a vibrant livable community, is founded on a vision where economic growth, high quality built environments, and healthy natural systems work in harmony to cultivate value for everyone. To elevate and extend this success, the City is establishing a bold vision for the future that continues to emphasize the overarching benefits of integrating natural systems with plans for sustainable growth of the built environment.

The City is endowed with significant natural features, including its own chain of lakes, which form the headwaters of Lake Minnetonka. Building off of Victoria's identity as the City of lakes, parks and trails, a vision for a Victoria Chain of Lakes has been established that will connect the City through a contiguous network of natural areas, trail corridors, parks, and public activity nodes.

The Victoria Chain of Lakes reflects an understanding that Victoria's natural systems create a unique sense of place. Preserving natural features, and strengthening the connection between them and the built environment provides social and economic value to the City; by reducing long term infrastructure costs, creating higher property values, and supporting a healthy and thriving community.

Victoria's Chain of Lakes will leverage the City's extraordinary natural resources into an interconnected and publicly accessible greenway system. The Chain of Lakes plan seeks to build off of the City's existing park and trail system, incorporating new public nodes on each lake, connecting to passive and active recreational areas, and enhancing the public experience of natural systems. The greenway will provide enhanced multimodal connections to housing and area amenities, including Downtown, Lions Park, Carver Park Reserve, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, and Lake Waconia. Figure 4.4 provides an illustrative view of the Chain of Lakes vision.

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan serves as a roadmap for this effort to enhance future development through the preservation and enhancement of Victoria's natural heritage. Following plan adoption, the City will work to develop complementary land use tools and, in partnership with Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, Carver County and other public and private partners to develop a strategic implementation plan to realize the vision of the Victoria Chain of Lakes. The implementation of this vision is explored further in "Victoria Chain of Lakes Greenway Policy & Implementation" on page 46.