



**Title:** Review of Active Responsive Model Opportunities

**Prepared by:** Name: Becky Christopher and Kate Moran  
Phone: 952-641-4512, 952-641-4520  
bchristopher@minnehahacreek.org, kmoran@minnehahacreek.org

**Purpose:**

At the March 11, 2021 Operations and Programs (OPC) Meeting, staff will brief the Board of Managers on four active partnership opportunities that are under evaluation through the Responsive Model. These opportunities may be brought forward for Board action at an upcoming meeting, so this briefing is intended to provide the Board with a preview of the potential recommendations and allow the Board to raise any questions or concerns that should be considered in staff's review.

**Background:**

Responsive Model Overview

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District's (District or MCWD) 2017 Watershed Management Plan (Plan) solidified the District's Balanced Urban Ecology policy as the underlying organizational strategy. This strategy prioritizes partnership with the land use community to integrate policy, planning and implementation to leverage the value created when built and natural systems work together.

To implement this strategy, the Plan articulated an approach that is two-pronged:

- Focusing in areas of high need and opportunity to achieve significant, measurable resource improvement
- Remaining responsive to needs and opportunities district-wide through coordination with partners

In order to carry out the second prong of this approach, the District is developing a "Responsive Model" to guide the District's process for identifying, evaluating, and responding to opportunities. The purpose of the Responsive Model is to provide support for public and private projects and initiatives that are well-coordinated and align with the District's goals and priorities. The District aims to carry out this approach in a way that provides value to its communities while making efficient use of District resources to allow the District to maintain focus on its highest priority projects and initiatives.

In late 2019, staff presented a draft framework for the Responsive Model to the Board of Managers, including purpose, goals, high-level process, and evaluation criteria. Since that time, staff have been operating the Responsive Model in a pilot phase while continuing to develop the internal workflows, technology tools, formal guidance documents, and outreach materials. During this pilot phase, staff have reviewed a number of opportunities and are using these to inform the development of the formal Responsive Model, which is anticipated to be brought forward for Board consideration in mid-2021.

Responsive Opportunities

The District has identified and evaluated 21 opportunities since late 2019. The considerations used during the evaluation process generally include:

- Resource Need and Priority: Alignment with the resource needs and priorities identified in the District's Plan or through ongoing monitoring and diagnostic efforts.

- Project Benefits: Estimated benefits across the District's 4 goals of water quality, water quantity, ecological integrity, and thriving communities.
- Cost Effectiveness: Cost effectiveness compared to alternatives or other past/current project opportunities.
- Partnership: Strength of partner's coordination, integration of District goals, and commitment to advance the opportunity.

Of these responsive opportunities, the most significant Responsive Model case study to-date has been the Long Lake Creek Partnership (LLCP) with the Cities of Long Lake, Medina, and Orono and the Long Lake Waters Association (LLWA). Through this partnership, the District assumed a lead role in conducting a subwatershed assessment and developing an implementation roadmap to guide implementation by the partners. The District also secured grant funding for one of the projects identified in the roadmap, which will be implemented by the City of Medina later this year.

Other responsive opportunities have been supported by providing services such as early regulatory screening, technical assistance, grant strategy, or letters of support. Others have been evaluated and declined with clear justification and careful management of the relationship. Several others are being tracked but are still in early stages of planning.

The responsive approach has been generally well-received by partners to-date. Staff's experiences indicate that this approach will be an effective way for the District to keep a pulse on land use plans and maintain relationships with cities and other partners across the watershed while limiting demand on staff capacity and financial resources.

#### **Summary:**

Currently, MCWD staff have several active responsive opportunities that have the potential of being brought forward for Board consideration of more substantial commitment of funding or entering into a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Staff are currently in coordination with partners and are awaiting further information before a recommendation will be brought forward. Staff's intent for the March 11<sup>th</sup> OPC Meeting is to provide the Board context on each of these opportunities and receive any questions and/or concerns ahead of a request for action by the Board, if a more substantial response is determined to be needed.

There are four active responsive opportunities described below. At the March 11, 2021 OPC Meeting, staff will provide a presentation including:

- details on the four active responsive opportunities, evaluation to-date, and the proposed next steps; and
- insights gathered from the pilot phase that will inform the formal Responsive Model.

#### City of Shorewood – Smithtown Pond Project

The western portion of the City of Shorewood has historic and ongoing drainage issues. Since 2017, MCWD has been coordinating with the City as they developed a system-wide stormwater management plan for the area. The City and MCWD entered into an MOU in March 2018 through which the District committed to serving as a resource to the City by providing technical assistance, regulatory process facilitation, and shared efforts to secure funding.

One of the projects that has been identified through this Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan is the Smithtown Pond Project. The purpose of the project is to reduce peak discharge rates in the Grant Lorenz Channel as well as reduce flooding potential in the Strawberry Lane, Shorewood Oaks, and Freeman Park neighborhoods. The City of Shorewood has requested funding support for the Smithtown Pond Project. The Project is estimated to provide water quality benefit that exceeds regulatory requirements; however, the estimated and required treatment levels are still being refined. The Smithtown Pond Project is planned for construction in summer 2021.

#### City of Edina – 54<sup>th</sup> Street Streambank Investigation

Local homeowners along Minnehaha Creek reached out to the City of Edina regarding a sediment delta that formed following the 2014 flood event and is diverting flows toward the bank of the homeowners' property. The City reached out to the District for technical and/or project assistance. The area is located in between two past District projects: (1) the Arden Park Restoration and (2) the Reach 14 Restoration. MCWD staff is developing a proposed scope of work to investigate the issue which will be brought for Board consideration at a later meeting.

City of Edina – Morningside Flood Reduction Infrastructure Project

The Morningside Neighborhood in Edina has several landlocked or low areas that are prone to flooding. The City of Edina has proactively looked to address these flood prone areas with detailed modeling, community engagement, and development of a Flood Risk Reduction Strategy. The City has requested support for this project through regulatory guidance and/or funding of relevant project elements (e.g., swales, water reuse areas, etc.). The project is scheduled to be completed in tandem with the anticipated 2022-23 street reconstruction projects in the neighborhood.

City of Victoria – Wetland Restoration with Developer

MCWD's Permitting staff has identified an opportunity to provide technical assistance to a developer to explore the feasibility of a potential wetland restoration that could exceed rule requirements. This is in a preliminary coordination phase; however, it could move rapidly if all parties are in agreement.

**Supporting documents:** N/A