MEMORANDUM

To: MCWD Board Members
From: James Wisker
Date: December 17, 2019
Re: MCWD Outreach – Strategic Shift

Purpose:
At the December 19, Planning and Policy Committee (PPC), staff and consultants will frame the strategic shift needed in MCWD's outreach programming, to support the District's organizational realignment.

Background:
The District is presently engaged in the process of re-building its outreach program from the ground up to support the organization's new strategic approach and priorities. This process includes methodically moving through the following steps.

1. Discovery – review and synthesis of all relevant past information related to MCWD outreach

2. Research – completing qualitative information gathering for MCWD's Tier 1 and 2 audiences, and the effectiveness of past programming

3. Insights – developing a deeper understanding of what the research means in relation to MCWD's future outreach needs

4. *Strategy – cultivating outreach options and direction that help the District accomplish its organizational project and policy objectives

5. Implementation – confronting tradeoffs, setting priorities, and developing the operational plans needed to execute the selected strategy

*Currently coalescing background, research and insights into a new strategic focus for the District's outreach.

Attachments:
Attached to this memorandum is a draft document that outlines a shift in approach to MCWD's outreach, and the background context that supports the proposed changes.

If you have questions in advance of the meeting, please contact James Wisker at
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Executive Summary:

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District's (MCWD or District) pioneering approach to watershed management, *A Balanced Urban Ecology,* recognizes that decisions about land use directly affect water. However, rather than viewing the natural and built environments as a clash of opposing forces, the District understands their interdependence – that when natural and built environments work in balance, a triple bottom line of social, economic and environmental value is created.

Therefore, to effectively carry out its mission, the District emphasizes close partnership with land use decision makers to integrate built and natural systems in ways that create value and enjoyment. The District views this kind of genuine community collaboration as providing the best hope for protecting and improving our water resources, while attaining the economic growth and high-quality built environment that works to the benefit of all.

To implement *A Balanced Urban Ecology* MCWD is undergoing a significant organizational transition, aligning its work and people to maximize effectiveness. To support this shift, and the District's focus on delivering high impact projects that improve the watershed and land-water policy changes that better integrate land and water planning, MCWD's outreach will require a full-scale shift.

This document outlines a new strategic approach for conducting MCWD's outreach, as well as the context and background that support it.

Below is a summary of the change in approach that will be needed.

Strategic Shift in Outreach Focus:
1. Refocus audience.
   Historically, MCWD's outreach has targeted a general public audience. Outreach will need to refocus, away from promoting behavior change through broad based communication and engaging individuals at a residential scale, to a much more targeted communication and engagement of communities in the development of the District's key projects and initiatives.

   To effectively support the organization's strategy moving forward, outreach must primarily focus on land use decision makers—policymakers, key agency staff, and developers—in order to develop high impact capital improvements that deliver value for the broader public, and promote enhanced collaboration between land and water planning.

2. Position MCWD's value to resonate with this audience.
   This shift in focal audience will require MCWD's outreach to articulate and emphasize the value created when the District is integrated early into land use decision making processes.

   Land use decision makers are not singularly occupied with water management. They are instead motivated by diverse interests such as transportation and infrastructure, affordable housing, parks and open space, equity, enhancing tax base, public safety, sustainability, addressing the needs of constituents, generating profit, and more. Therefore, MCWD's outreach must effectively position the District as a trusted navigator in the complex world of water, adding value to partner initiatives in ways that achieve better water outcomes while also enhancing the goals that matter most to these audiences.

3. Outreach must support MCWD's most effective channels.
   As the District has refocused its value proposition and key partners, it must also realign its outreach through the organization's most effective distribution channels.

   Research completed reveal insights regarding the most effective tactics and channels for engaging the District's land use audiences. The most effective approach for these target audiences are deep and rich, context-specific, interpersonal and relationship-based communications (e.g. meetings, presentations, phone calls, e-mails). This level of audience engagement is being carried out by MCWD program staff in pursuit of their strategic initiatives – project managers in focal geographies, permitting staff working with cities and developers, and policy planners working to implement the District's responsive model. In these ways, MCWD program staff can be thought of as relationship managers for the District's land use audiences.

   Historically, project and program staff have not been viewed as primary communication channels through which the organization could deliver information to its target audience – as MCWD's outreach emphasized broad based communications and the engagement of a residential audience. Therefore, MCWD's outreach programing was not embedded to strategically support or evaluate these channels, leaving the District's key relationship managers to independently implement high-value outreach largely unsupported.

   Moving forward, MCWD's outreach program must directly align with the most effective outreach being completed – that of the District's program staff (relationship managers) – by supporting the preparation, execution and evaluation of high impact meetings and presentations. This will increase the quality and consistency of MCWD's high-value interactions, across the organization. It will also enable the District's outreach to be able to monitor the attitudes and opinions of key publics within the watershed, better positioning the program to strategically guide future outreach, developing more systematic approaches, and doing so in a mode of continuous improvement.

4. Strategically align outreach tactics around MCWD's key initiatives.
   To complement the high-value outreach being completed through MCWD's program staff channels, the outreach program must align and custom tailor outreach tactics in support of the District's key initiatives (e.g. Six Mile Creek – Halsted Bay, responsive model, permitting).

   Each District initiative has a unique strategic context (e.g. water centric issues, physical landscape, policy needs, communities, relationships) that, in turn, require a unique outreach strategy and configuration of tactics. Historically, MCWD's outreach has consisted of a uniform suite of channels (e.g. annual publications, e-newsletters), and then sought organizational content to populate them via an editorial calendar. In this way, content available at any point in time supported the editorial calendar process, rather than outreach tactics being assembled to support the unique needs of MCWD's priority initiatives. The District must move away from a static, "one size fits all," approach that populates a fixed editorial schedule with organizational content available at that particular moment.

   Custom outreach plans must be developed that are tailored to support the specific strategic context of each key initiative, across its various stages of conceptualization, planning, and implementation. Customizing plans for each initiative will ensure that the right tools are chosen, in the right proportion, for each job – aligning tactical outreach to support MCWD's priority work in ways that are driven by strategic need and context.

5. <u>Providing limited broad-based outreach.</u>
    While de-prioritized, the program will continue to provide limited broad-based outreach (e.g. mass media, publications, op-ed pieces, news releases) to maintain brand presence, and frame the larger water resource issues facing the District, while also connecting stakeholders to information they value through the District's redesigned website.

Snapshot of Change:
Below is a summary snapshot comparing and contrasting MCWD's existing outreach approach against the future focus needed to support the District's new mode of operation.

<u>Existing Outreach:</u>	<u>Future Outreach:</u>
Residential audience	Land use community audience
Message calling for clean water action by individuals, supported by small incentive grants and programming	Position the triple bottom line value crated when MCWD is integrated early into land use as a partner in helping create thriving communities
Broad based, mass appeal, with little interactivity	Targeted, customized and context specific appeal, with high interactivity
Outreach primarily delivered directly by outreach staff as a discrete service separate from other key initiatives	Outreach primarily delivered by project/program staff working on key MCWD initiatives, integrally supported by Outreach staff
Supporting key initiatives largely via reporting on the work, without detailed context	Embedded in key initiatives, with context of work being supported
Fixed tactics, channels and editorial calendar in search of content from the organization	Custom tailored plans that align tactics and channels to support unique initiative context
Reliant on consultants to monitor audience attitudes and perspectives, and to provide strategic adjustments to outreach over time	Outreach staff collecting and analyzing audience information, and adjusting outreach to be more effective over time via continuous improvement

Defining Success:
Successful outcomes of the District's shift in its approach to outreach will include the following:

1. <u>MCWD is viewed as a trusted and valued partner.</u>
    The District being engaged earlier in processes by communities, developers and other stakeholders. We are recognized and actively sought out for our *Balanced Urban Ecology* expertise. Being perceived as adding value for our partners by being uniquely able to integrate land and water in ways that contribute to their vision for thriving communities. Experiencing more opportunities to implement its mission through high impact capital improvements, with increasing financial support from public and private partners. Partners supporting the District's approach through meaningful policy change that enhances the integration of land and water planning.

2. <u>MCWD is positioned as a thought leader in defining key water management issues and solutions.</u>
   The District will be viewed as credible and trusted thought leaders, able to actively define the challenges and opportunities for water management in the entire watershed. Creating broad understanding among stakeholders of what actions are required and cultivating space and urgency for effective solutions to be implemented.

3. <u>MCWD is making more efficient use of resources.</u>
   By engaging earlier in issues, by identifying issues most important to successful water management, and by taking proactive, comprehensive approaches, the District will be able to marshal its resources in ways that are most effective and efficient.

MCWD's Strategic Frame:

Land Use Drives Water:
A diverse mosaic of land use spans the watershed's 29 communities, from rural in the west to dense urban in the east. Waterbodies and their affiliated natural resources are a product of their watersheds, and so these landscapes directly affect the health of the watershed. For example, changes on the land often remove natural vegetation and create impervious surfaces, which reduces the infiltration of rainfall into local aquifers, creating more runoff, flooding, and pollutant loading.

Given this direct link between water and the surrounding landscape, watershed organizations like MCWD must actively help guide our built environments in order to improve the overall ecology of its natural systems. However, watershed districts do not own the land needed to reduce flooding or improve water quality, nor do they directly control decisions made regarding how land is used and developed – or the infrastructure needed to support city growth. Over 75% of land in the state is privately owned, and land use decisions are made by cities and towns, counties, regional planning and transportation agencies.

MCWD's "Customer":
Therefore, watershed managers must assemble data and provide information in ways that influence the decisions of private land developers and their teams of consulting advisors (architects, engineers, and landscape architects), as well as appointed and elected city officials (public works, community development and parks staff, planning commissions and city councils), to work collaboratively to integrate water interests into land planning and decision making.

The Call for Land Use – Water Integration:
For these reasons, improving the integration between land use planning and watershed management is identified as a key policy objective in Minnesota. Over time many different reports have highlighted similar themes: (1) That the amount and quality of water is directly tied to local land use decisions; and (2) That the major goals for Minnesota's water can only succeed with strong links to land use management and control. Reports calling for this integration include:
- 2007 Evaluation on Watershed Management – Office of the Legislative Auditor
- 2009 Land and Water Policy Project – Minnesota Environmental Initiative
- 2011 Hennepin County Water Governance Project – Humphrey School of Public Affairs
- 2013 Water Regulation and Governance – Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- 2016 Policy Guide on Water – American Planning Association

The Land Use – Water Governance Gap:
These reports identify a persistent disconnect between land and water planning, and map significant barriers to accomplishing the integration and coordination being demanded.

For example, that opportunities to address water and land use connections have waned in recent decades. That water and land planning in Minnesota is compartmentalized at all levels, under separate bodies of regulation and various agency jurisdictions. That the interaction between politically-managed built systems and science-based watershed management was complicated, and required significant effort to coordinate.

<u>Why Does the Land-Water Disconnect Persist?</u>
Students of the land use and water disconnect have observed that it is persistent due primarily to the fact that land use planning and water quality management are administered by separate agencies, not in a perpetual state of coordination. And, that these agencies conduct their work within discrete and well architected silos, consisting of separate bureaucracies – norms, languages, procedures, and funding.

As with notable international examples, like the Dutch, water management is conventionally limited to technicians and engineers who operate within agencies that have their own geographic areas and taxing powers, while land planning is left to other local officials (Woltjer, 2013). More specifically, land use audiences are not singularly focused on water management. They are motivated by diverse interests such as affordable housing and equity, parks and open space, transportation and infrastructure, enhancing tax base, public safety, satisfying constituents, generating profit, and more.

Peter Campbell noted, in *Urban Planning and the Contradictions of Sustainable Development*, that the goal of planning may be to serve the broader public interest by harmonizing economic growth, environmental preservation and social justice. But, in reality, despite efforts to escape the silos, planners are often restricted by professional and fiscal constraints to serving the narrow interests of their clients – that is, authorities and bureaucracies.

Consequently, environmental factors are still largely only considered in land planning processes as a regulatory burden, rather than an opportunity to catalyze the attainment of other, often primary, goals. In parallel, these reports are critical of the tendency of water planners to focus on engineering solutions, and the overarching reactive posture of watershed organizations who view land use plans as fait accompli.

With water agencies relying on regulation as a principal strategy, water managers are frequently viewed in opposition to growth and economic development. Consequently, water planning has tended to be viewed as subordinate. This disconnect has occurred through decades of uncoordinated actions, and has persisted due to the separate legal bases for each area of governance (Bates, 2012).

<u>Bridging the Gap – MCWD's Balanced Urban Ecology:</u>
Recognizing these fundamental tensions, and building on a long lineage of thinkers who recognized the symbiotic relationship between the built and natural ecosystems, in 2014 the District a guiding policy titled, *In Pursuit of a Balanced Urban Ecology* (Attached). This policy ultimately became the District's overarching strategy bridge the land use – water governance gap. The policy identified three principles:
- We will join with others in pursuing our watershed management goals.
- We will intensify and maintain our focus on high-priority projects.
- We will be flexible and creative in adapting our practices to those of our partners.

Based on the insights from the research from this plan, a fourth tenant is directly relevant to realigning MCWD's outreach strategy:

- ***We will lead the discussion and understanding of select critical issues that impact water.*** To position MCWD as a desired partner and trusted navigator, the District will mobilize its expertise and resources to be a thought leader on select issues that pose major threats or opportunities for water within the Minnehaha Creek Watershed.

Outreach Assessment Background:

To align its outreach with the organization's strategic shift, District staff, Board and CAC have been working through a methodical process to assess current programming and target audience perceptions against the strategic frame the MCWD is operating within.

Process:

The process to align the District's outreach programming includes the following steps:
- Discovery – assembling all relevant background information from MCWD
- Research – qualitative interviews, focus groups and surveys of MCWD's "customers"
- Insights – turning discovery and research into insights related to MCWD's audience/outreach
- Strategy – framing the strategic shift in MCWD's outreach program
- Implementation – developing an action plan to implement the new program focus

Research and Insights Process:

An extensive research process was conducted to produce insights that inform this shift. This work included:
- 35 interviews with key Tier 1 stakeholders (agency staff, policymakers, and developers)
- A survey of more than 350 interested members of the public
- In-depth focus groups with 19 interested members of the public
- Feedback from MCWD staff on the District's existing programming and audience perceptions
- A review of the program's history, including analysis of effectiveness data on current activities

Key Insights:

Research conducted by the District and its consultants produced insights, including:
- MCWD audiences can be thought of broadly in two Tiers:
  - Tier 1: Policymakers, agency staff, and developers who directly influence land use decisions in the watershed
  - Tier 2: Interested publics, property owners, and those who recreate within the watershed, who indirectly influence land use decisions

- MCWD's shift from focusing on reaching a general public to land use influencers is comparable to a shift from a consumer-facing business to a business-to-business (B2B) approach: In order to deliver value to a broader public, it will focus its efforts on influencing a smaller group of professionals

- Outreach is something everyone does, not just Outreach staff; in fact, the Outreach carried out by MCWD relationship managers (e.g. project managers, policy planners, permitting staff, research and monitoring experts) is often most impactful

- Key audiences prefer customized, interpersonal communications in the form of meetings and presentations with MCWD relationship managers

- MCWD should be positioned as a trusted navigator for the complex world of water

- Extreme weather events will be among the most significant potential sources of future conflict

Problem Statement:
To achieve its water mission MCWD must work to modify the landscape. However, the District has minimal control over how the landscape is altered over time. Therefore, it must collaborate closely and partner with land use decision makers, who have much broader interests than water management.

MCWD Outreach Goal:
In order to effectively engage key land use publics in MCWD's water resource mission, the District is strategically positioning itself as a preferred and trusted partner that provides value-added service, creates a triple bottom line, and supports the development of thriving communities.

Implications for MCWD's Current Outreach:
The Outreach program's historic approach is misaligned with the District's broader strategy in several key ways:
- MCWD's focus is on high-impact capital projects, while the Outreach program has focused on small-scale residential best practices

- MCWD's most critical audience is the land use community, while the program primarily communicates to a broader general public of residents

- The most effective way of reaching land use audiences is through custom-tailored interpersonal outreach (meetings, presentations, phone calls, e-mails), while the program primarily focuses on mass channels

- These interpersonal interactions are best carried out by MCWD relationship managers in the course of pursuing their strategic objectives, while the program focuses on outreach conducted by outreach staff

- Each major District initiative has a unique strategic context that calls for different outreach tactics, while the program maintains a suite of tactical channels and then seeks content to populate them.

Aligning MCWD's Outreach with A Balanced Urban Ecology:

To best align with the District's priorities, the Outreach program will need to refocus its efforts in the following ways.

1. Enhancing high-impact interpersonal communications

As described above, MCWD's most critical <u>audience</u> are professionals who have direct control of land use decisions within the watershed.

The most effective outreach <u>tactic</u> for engaging and building support from this audience are interpersonal, relationship-based communications: meetings, presentations, phone calls, letters, and e-mails.

The most effective <u>channel</u> for delivering these tactics are from the MCWD team members who build relationships with these audiences in the course of carrying out their strategic work. These "relationship managers" include Board Managers, MCWD Administrator, project managers, policy planners, permitting representatives, and research and monitoring scientists. Importantly, it is typically not Outreach staff delivering the highest impact Outreach products.

While these high-stakes interpersonal interactions have always occurred in the course of doing business, they have not historically been thought of as "outreach" products or channels, and therefore the Outreach program has not played a role in enhancing or evaluating them. Instead, Outreach staff has focused resources on broad-based activities produced by Outreach staff themselves (in the form of tactics like newsletters, events, trainings) while relationship managers have been left to conduct these critical outreach events unsupported.

Thus, for the Outreach program to best support the highest impact outreach tactics, its primary focus will be on supporting relationship managers in high-impact interpersonal communication.

This work will happen in three phases: Preparation, execution, and evaluation.

<u>Preparation Phase:</u> Outreach staff work with the relationship manager to solidify the strategic approach and framing for an outreach event. These services will include facilitating brainstorming, advising on framing, anticipating difficult questions, memorializing talking points, and creating key supporting materials in the form of graphics, videos, photos, or publications. For written communications, this may include creating outlines or first drafts of e-mails or letters.

<u>Execution Phase:</u> Outreach staff ensure the relationship manager is prepared to successfully conduct the outreach. This may include rehearsal and roleplay, coaching, and finalizing slides and other handouts.

<u>Evaluation Phase:</u> De-briefing from key meetings is critical to memorialize knowledge and continuously improve. However, in the past it typically happened organically — on the drive back or at the water cooler — if at all. Recognizing the stacked benefits of collaboratively processing and reflecting after key meetings, Outreach staff will convene structured de-brief sessions. These allow relationship managers to process the event, ensure continuous improvement for both the managers and Outreach staff, and capture key data on the interaction. This data is used to track meaningful metrics about the organization's Outreach performance.

Hypothetical example:

As part of carrying out the strategic goals of the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay focal geography program, the project manager, Anna Brown, schedules a presentation to the city council of a SMCHB community. The presentation is seeking approval for a jointly-funded park improvement that will significantly expand flood storage capacity, helping the community better manage increasing rainfall patterns while achieving a number of community goals: Increasing open space, creating an important trail connection between downtown and a regional trail, and building a much needed play area in a growing area of town.

Two weeks before the presentation, the Outreach program convenes a one-hour planning session with Anna and her team to determine the key goals, strategy, and message framing for the meeting. An Outreach staff member, who is trained in a well-established meeting management framework that ensures productive consensus building, facilitates the meeting, which allows the participants to focus on critical thinking. Strategic advice is informed by the staff's professional expertise, knowledge of the project, and best practices of a well-established presentation framework they have been trained in.

The program also provides a researched report on the members of the Council that informs the discussion. The report notes that two of the councilmembers were recently elected and have not heard previous presentations on the project. The Outreach tracking database indicates these councilmembers have each received the District's SMCHB e-newsletter, but neither opened the messages. This suggests that the presentation will need more baseline information than usual.

Thanks in part to the skilled facilitation of the meeting, the team reaches a consensus on the strategy and messages for the presentation and leaves the meeting energized. Outreach staff develop a detailed outline of the presentation based on the discussion. The outline includes key talking points, a narrative structure, a list of slides with key content, and a list of likely questions and effective answers. With the burden of creating the first draft absorbed by the Outreach program, Anna and her team can bring a fresh critical perspective to the outline. The group collaboratively refines the outline into a maximally crisp and effective draft.

An Outreach staff member then creates a first draft of the slides based on this outline. The slides feature attractive imagery, sleek design, and custom graphics that elucidate key points. Because the team had determined that the site is difficult to visualize, this staff member also visits the site and records high-quality aerial footage to use with the slides. Because of his/her specialization, the staff member is able to create the slides and video more quickly and to a higher professional standard than a relationship manager could, and this frees up the relationship manager to critically refine the slides.

The day before the presentation, an Outreach staff member meets with Anna to rehearse the presentation. Based on a sound presentation framework he/she has been trained in, the staff member provides feedback on the presentation's effectiveness. The variety of suggestions includes emphasizing a major point earlier, talking slower, and ending with a more impactful statement. The staff member roleplays as various councilmembers asking challenging questions, allowing Anna to rehearse effective answers. Anna becomes increasingly confident delivering the presentation as she rehearses.

After the rehearsal, a staff member puts the finishing touches on the slides and prepares a simple one-page leave behind about the project.

On the night of the presentation, Anna presents the information with authority and confidence, and provides concise and compelling answers to questions from council. Of all the presentations made that night, MCWD's slides are the only that have been but together by a professional designer, and stand in

stark contrast to the homespun slides from other presenters. The air-tight narrative, well-rehearsed delivery, and attractive slides combine to make a significant impression on the councilmembers: MCWD is a sophisticated and valuable partner. The project is approved.

The day after the presentation, the Outreach program convenes a half-hour de-briefing session — which had been scheduled weeks before. For Anna and her team, this ensures an opportunity to process and memorialize what happened at the presentation while it is still fresh. The team particularly discusses two difficult questions they had not anticipated, and how such questions should be answered in the future.

The debrief also provides a rich two-way learning opportunity. Because the council meeting was broadcast online, Outreach staff was able to watch the presentation and provides feedback on Anna's presentation execution. Anna and her team, in turn, provide feedback on the effectiveness of Outreach's services.

Finally, the Outreach staff collect systemized data on the interaction: Which audience members were reached, notes on any conflicts or points of resonance, and a rating of success according to well-vetted scales. This information is logged in the organization-wide outreach database. This database tracks information on all interactions with audience members allowing the program to evaluate and visualize the breadth of outreach conducted. By memorializing notes on each interaction across the organization, the system builds institutional knowledge and enhances consistency of communication across relationship managers.

Result: Success or failure in high-impact interpersonal communications fundamentally determines whether MCWD achieves its goals. In the hypothetical example provided, it's possible that excellence in this single 20-minute presentation has a greater impact on MCWD's "bottom line" than a year's worth of newsletters or social media posts.

Therefore, optimizing an Outreach program to enhance, track, and evaluate these communications events puts the specialized skills and knowledge of an Outreach staff to their most impactful use. This approach also reduces burden on relationship managers and empowers them to focus on the highest-impact aspects of their own role. Finally, it encourages collaboration, continuous improvement, and sharing of institutional knowledge — core tenants of MCWD's approach.

2. Create and execute custom outreach plans for key initiatives
Historically, the Outreach program has set goals, audiences, and tactics at a global level (e.g. bi-weekly e-newsletters for general public, daily social media posts, quarterly newsletter for policymakers, and training for 25 engaged residents). Outreach staff then used information about District initiatives to populate the content or direction for these tactics.

Research insights indicate that Outreach tactics must be more directly tied to the specific strategic context of key District initiatives. To do so, the program must shift focus away from maintaining tactical channels such as (e.g. social media campaigns, newsletters, and volunteer trainings) for their own sake. Instead, custom outreach plans for each key initiative will dictate the strategies and tactics best suited to the situation.

For a project in a tight-knit neighborhood, for example, neighborhood open houses and a project newsletter may be critical for avoiding conflict with residents. For revising a regulatory requirement, individual meetings with developers and a plain-language fact sheet may be key. For a new focal geography, coalition building and direct mail may be core components of the strategy. In each instance, the program is only engaging in tactics specifically called for by the strategic context of the initiative.

Key initiatives of the District may include focal geographies, projects supported by MCWD's responsive model, major policy changes, or thought leadership on critical issues. The suite of potential tactics includes, but is not limited to:

Communication-oriented	Engagement-oriented
Key messages	Programming project sites
Publications	Tours
Fact sheets	Facilitating public input processes
E-newsletters	Audience research
Web pages	Presentations to key audiences
Media relations campaigns	Engaging resident groups and coalition building
Videos	Volunteer management
Social media campaigns	Professional trainings
Paid advertising	Conferences

Hypothetical examples:

1) Permitting program re-design:

In 2020, MCWD designates a new key initiative: re-designing the Permitting program as part of the organization's multi-year change management process. This re-design encourages partnership, improves customer service, and creates efficiencies. The goal is to position MCWD as a trusted navigator and result in high-impact collaborations that achieve better outcomes for both the District and applicants.

To best support this critical initiative, Outreach staff convenes a process to create a comprehensive Outreach plan that is optimized for achieving the specific goals of the process. The Engagement Coordinator facilitates a series of sessions with the Permitting Lead Tom Dietrich, MCWD Leadership Team, and the Outreach Lead to discuss the key goals, audiences, strategy, tactics, timeline, and roles. The Outreach Lead synthesizes this information into a draft plan for the team to collaboratively refine. Like other key decisions in the initiative, these plans are vetted through the Board and CAC through the larger process of the program redesign.

Depending on the strategy identified, these Outreach tactics could include:

- *Identifying opportunities for Tom to present to developer group meetings and conferences — and supporting these presentations according to the process in the previous section*
- *Creating and facilitating a developer advisory group*
- *Boilerplate talking points for pre-application meetings*
- *Updated forms and fact sheets for making the process easier to navigate*
- *Portfolio of case-studies highlighting successful MCWD permitting collaborations*

2) New focal geography:

In 2024 MCWD formally designates a new formal geography. The Outreach staff convenes a team to create a comprehensive Outreach plan. Like other planning elements, this plan is vetted and collaboratively refined with the project managers, Board, and CAC. The group defines the following goals for the first phase of the initiative:

1. *Generate excitement about the benefits to be realized from MCWD's focus on the region*
2. *Create personal relationships with key land use influencers that will be critical for implementing future projects*
3. *Engage resident groups to mitigate potential conflicts and build grassroots support for MCWD initiatives*
4. *Create baseline awareness among developers of the benefits of coordinating with MCWD in the region*

The strategic plan calls for a number of Outreach services oriented toward these goals. These include:

- *Audience research report on the current councils of each city, highlighting their priorities, recent conflicts, strong personalities, etc.*
- *Report on community leaders, local interests, and how best to engage them*
- *A letter on behalf of MCWD Board President summarizing MCWD's approach to focal geographies and highlighting past successes, sent to all public land use influencers in the region*
- *A series of interpersonal meetings between MCWD relationship managers and key agency staff members*
- *Overview presentations to the city council of each community, with a one-page leave-behind publication*
- *An analysis of permit applications in the region from the past five years to identify likely large-scale developers, and a personal phone call from the Permitting Lead for each describing how to coordinate early with MCWD*
- *Facilitating the establishment of a lake association around a water resource that District will likely be building capital projects around*
- *For an active Facebook group for residents in a key neighborhood, a welcome message and active participation in discussions related to water resources*

- *For an initial project in an engaged neighborhood, an open house for neighborhood members and a monthly newsletter with project updates*
- *Bi-annual column on behalf of a Board Manager in the local newspaper of each community, which land use influencers are known to read, focused on MCWD's recent work in the region*

Result: Each MCWD initiative has a unique has a specific strategic context that calls for different strategies and tactics for success. Creating initiative-specific outreach plans ensures the Outreach program is focusing resources only on high-value activities that directly advance MCWD goals. Executing collaboratively-created plans ensures that everyone involved in an initiative understands why particular tactics have been chosen and are aligned around making them succeed.

3. Limited Broad-Based Outreach

The Outreach program will need to continue to provide some scalable, broad-based outreach that isn't directed by a strategic outreach plan for a key initiative. This will typically happen in situations when

- There is an opportunity for significant reach with limited ongoing effort, such as static information for residents who want to engage in small-scale BMP's or paddle Minnehaha Creek
- An MCWD program has information to share that isn't part of a key initiative, such as water levels or project updates
- Providing information is required by policy or best practice, such as budget information or requests for proposals

These activities will be optimized for efficiency to ensure Outreach efforts are aligned with the highest-impact activities. For example, the District's website can act as a hub for information about recreation and small-scale BMP's that requires little active upkeep after the initial content development.

It will also include interpersonal outreach conducted by Outreach staff to augment existing channels, such as presentations, conferences, open houses, and tours.

This limited broad-based outreach helps build general support for future initiatives, connects engaged residents with information they value, and fulfills the District's commitment to transparency.

IN PURSUIT OF A BALANCED URBAN ECOLOGY
IN THE MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED

WHAT: Everyone who lives and works in the Minnehaha Creek Watershed is part of an intricate urban ecological system of natural and man-made parts. Finding ways for these parts to work in reasonable harmony is the key to achieving the balanced, sustainable and ultimately successful communities we seek. Rather than viewing the natural and built environments as a clash of opposing forces, we recognize the inter-related and inter-dependent character of modern life; communities cannot thrive without healthy natural areas, and healthy natural areas become irrelevant without the interplay of human activity. This is the integrated setting in which we live.

As caretakers of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed, we aim to manage our natural resources within this broader ecological context. Recognizing the integrated relationships of our surroundings, we seek also to integrate our work with that of other partners in the public, private and civic sectors. This kind of genuine community collaboration provides our best hope for protecting and improving our water resources while attaining the economic growth and high-quality built environment that will work to the benefit of all.

WHY: We will be more effective if we work in partnerships. A healthy natural environment is in everyone's best interest. Adopting that truth as an over-arching principle will help us to protect and sustain the lakes, streams, wetlands, wildlife habitat and public green spaces that are the signature of our metropolitan area while also helping to grow our economy in responsible ways. Indeed, our quality of life and our economic wellbeing are inextricably linked. Any notion that land development and environmental protection are locked in a winner-take-all battle is sadly outdated.

Unfortunately, government structures haven't quite caught up with that reality. Land-use activities continue to be primarily the focus of private enterprise as well as the various planning, zoning, public works and job-creation agencies in several layers of government. Meanwhile, other interests, mainly non-profits and other government agencies are focused on conserving natural assets and protecting them from the damage that development can inflict. No single entity has the authority or the resources to cope with all of these questions, or to strike a reasonable balance. That's why collaboration is so important.

Successful, sustainable, livable communities are built on a foundation of *integrated* planning – planning that recognizes communities as living organisms and takes into consideration all components of the urban ecology. Our work will be strengthened through these collaborative efforts. Not only will they offer greater community impact, they will produce creative public-private funding opportunities that will leverage scarce resources and maximize benefits. Going it alone is no longer the best path forward.

HOW: Three guiding principles will drive our actions:

- ***We will join with others in pursuing our watershed management goals.*** Success will be built on collaborative efforts among multiple partners in various sectors. The aim will be to develop a deeper understanding of the needs and desires of communities in order to design watershed projects that are more broadly conceived and appreciated, and that enhance social and economic viability as well as environmental benefit. To accomplish this, the MCWD will work with other government agencies, private landowners and developers, and philanthropic partners in cross-jurisdictional settings. We can serve in any number of roles in seeking to improve land development decisions, enhance water and natural resources planning, advance job creation or expand recreational activities. In this way, watershed initiatives are more likely to contribute to the broader project of building successful, sustainable communities.
- ***We will intensify and maintain our focus on high-priority projects.*** While our approach will broaden, our focus will not weaken, nor will our attention span diminish. Complex water management issues require perseverance as well as a cooperative and creative spirit. Our aim will be to develop high-impact projects through a sound public process, one that is transparent and open to the contributions of community stakeholders. At the same time, we will not neglect the more routine needs of the entire watershed. It is through the trust and depth of human relationships that organizations perform best. Our aim is to focus and to sustain: to seek new projects but not to forget our responsibility to operate and maintain that which we've already built.
- ***We will be flexible and creative in adapting our practices to those of our partners.*** MCWD will provide a safe harbor for bold, creative thinking among all partners. Rather than erect barriers, we will encourage projects that incorporate the investment plans and the capital improvement programs of our partners, recognizing the greater potential benefits that can come from leveraging various assets. With our partners, we will seek new ways to forge effective public, private and civic sector collaborations that benefit the environment, the economy and the social wellbeing of our communities.