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**Title:** Website Process and Schedule Update

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**Purpose:**

To frame a committee discussion on the key ideas in the Phase I website content plan, which will be followed by a more detailed review of the plan in October. Staff will present the overall approach and a summary of the core content sections, and seek the committee's counsel on the following questions:

- How well does the website plan align with the Outreach strategy the Board set out in February?
- Are there core sections that are missing or off-base in their orientation?
- Are there "wish-list" features on the site the Board would like to flag for future exploration?
- What would the committee like to hear more about at next discussion in October?

**Background:**

In February 2020, the Board of Managers finalized a new strategic direction for MCWD's Outreach program based on extensive input from Board and CAC members, stakeholders, staff, residents, and advisors.

The new strategic direction calls for an increased emphasis on supporting high-impact interpersonal outreach that is tied to key District initiatives, and a decreased emphasis on broad-based messaging. As a result, the program can better help the organization deliver value to its residents and stakeholders by providing more tailored and effective outreach around its key initiatives – in particular, capital projects that measurably improve water quality.

However, the realignment plan recognizes a variety of other "customers" that MCWD must serve as part of its core mission. To achieve this shift in emphasis while continuing to meet the needs of residents and partners, MCWD's website must effectively fulfill many of the common requests for information that were often addressed by MCWD's previous broad-based outreach programs and the staff that administered them. It must do so by effectively connecting people to the information they want or need.

To achieve this, MCWD has been preparing to re-launch a new website, replacing a site that is almost 10 years old and suffers from bloat, information overload, and outdated design. This re-designed website has the potential to deliver more value to the District's variety of stakeholders by satisfying their requests for information while communicating the value MCWD's work delivers and providing transparency around its practices.

To ensure the website achieves these goals, MCWD selected the marketing firm Vendi in a competitive process to help develop a content plan which sets the stage for designing and building the site in 2021. In 2019 Vendi led

a discovery and planning process that included user surveys, focus groups, a CAC work session, and a series of content planning sessions with staff and CAC members. Based on the input gathered, MCWD and Vendi defined the following overarching website goals, in order of priority:

1. Connect people to the information they value
2. Highlight the value MCWD provides across the watershed
3. Provide transparency and organizational information

Through that process, a few key principles emerged for developing the plan:

- Begin with a judicious focus on the most important content. Website design processes often go wrong when too many ideas are pursued, creating an overloaded website with too much peripheral content to actively maintain. This is a concern with MCWD's current website. Staff aimed to focus on the content that delivers significant value to its users, knowing that there will be opportunities to add functionality in the future.
- Leverage high-quality third-party content whenever possible. There are many high-quality existing resources on general topics like best management practices and watershed education. When possible, the site will curate these resources instead of creating new resources from scratch.
- Weave in MCWD's brand position throughout. While the primary goal of the site is to connect people to the information they want or need, each core section should also promote the value MCWD provides and reflect the District's brand of integrating land and water in pursuit of a balanced urban ecology.

### **Core Model Process**

With those goals and principles established, MCWD and Vendi have collaborated on a content planning process known as Vendi's "Core Model Process" to define the architecture of the site and the core content required to achieve its goals. Those core sections are:

- Permits: Leveraging the power of the online permitting portal currently in development, the primary goal of this section is to ensure that a user can enter in the specific location and type of project they are considering, and be provided information about the exact steps that will be required to obtain approval. Users will be able to indicate a project location and type on a map and then learn what rules are triggered, what they will need to comply, what steps they must take to obtain approval – and also be able to enter the application process. Secondly, this section will emphasize the potential for partnering with MCWD to achieve win-win outcomes. It will feature a page with information about partnering with the District, a connection to the responsive model, and case studies on a handful of successful partnerships.
- Water Data: Most users are not interested in watershed-wide data in aggregate, but in information about a specific water body that is relevant to them. To meet this need, the centerpiece of the Water Data section will be an interactive map that allows a user to choose the water body that is most relevant to them and view monitoring data, learn about the surrounding subwatershed, and find links to additional partner agency information. Within this section is also a "Water Budget" page that provides real-time water levels fed by the RESNET remote sensor network and information about how MCWD leverages technology and partnership in its operation of Gray's Bay dam.
- Recreation: Core to MCWD's brand is the idea that healthy natural systems underpin quality of life in our communities – and recreation is one of the primary ways people interact with water resources within the District. The recreation section will feature a map that highlights select recreational opportunities throughout the watershed that are relevant to the District's mission: Paddling, boat launches, beaches, regional parks, and regional trails. Key District-related recreational opportunities, such as the Minnehaha Creek Greenway or Six Mile Marsh Prairie, will be particularly highlighted. The section will also feature the highly-trafficked resources on paddling Minnehaha Creek and boating Lake Minnetonka.

- What You Can Do: This section serves users who are actively interested in taking action to protect clean water. The section is organized according to the five most common categories of request with the question, “I would like to”:
  - Use best practices on my property – e.g., installing raingardens, low-impact turf care
  - Educate myself – e.g., water science basics, water governance
  - Educate others – e.g., curricula for teachers, materials for community meetings
  - Take action in my community – e.g., joining community groups, adopting a drain
  - Support MCWD’s work – e.g., statements of support for an MCWD project, joining CAC

Within each category are hubs of information that include curated information, referrals, and funding opportunities.

- Projects: Project web pages highlight the impact of MCWD’s most important initiatives. The emphasis of these project pages is providing a clear up-front snapshot of the rationale for building the project and its key outcomes, while situating each project within the context of the watershed. Each page will also allow for a variety of community engagement tools that can be selectively displayed based on the needs of the project. This section also includes definitive landing pages for each Focal Geography, highlighting the latest work and the overall value of the focused work.
- About Us: The About Us section provides any user a generalized understanding of what MCWD is and does, regardless of their level of prior knowledge. It also provides more sophisticated information about MCWD’s Balanced Urban Ecology approach. Finally, it provides key organizational information such as Board and CAC members, financial information, and upcoming meetings.

#### **Next steps**

- October OPC Meeting: More detailed review of Phase I content plan
- November Board of Managers Meeting: Review final draft of Phase I content plan
- Early 2021: MCWD develops and issues RFP for Phase II: Design and Build