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**Title:** Adoption of Phase I Website Content Strategy

**Resolution number:** 20-088

**Prepared by:** Trevor Born  
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**Reviewed by:** James Wisker, MCWD Administrator

**Recommended action:** Adopt the Phase I website content strategy

**Past Board action:** Res # 19-060 Authorization to execute a contract for website redesign consultant

Res # 19-026 Authorization to release Request For Proposals (RFP) for Website Redesign

**Summary:**

Following briefings to the Operations and Programs Committee (OPC) in September and October, and a robust input process involving staff, Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), and members of MCWD's key audiences, staff is seeking the Board's approval of the Phase I website content strategy. This plan defines the site's architecture and the key content items needed to achieve its goals. It lays the foundation for decisions about copywriting, design, and configuration that will be made during the Phase II design and build.

At the September 2020 OPC meeting, staff presented the overall approach to the content planning and a summary of the core content sections, and committee members provided input on ways the core sections could best support the goals of the site. At the October OPC meeting, staff provided a more detailed overview of the contents of the plan, and the members discussed ideas for measuring whether MCWD is achieving the goals laid out for the site, and wish-list items for future phases of build-out. After the October discussion, committee members expressed comfort with advancing the plan for formal approval in November.

At the November 19 Board meeting, staff provided a high-level summary of the content plan, how it fits in with the realigned approach to Outreach the Board set out earlier this year, and considerations for next steps.

**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 begun preparing to 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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

### **Core Model Process**

With those goals and principles established, MCWD and Vendi have collaborated on content planning, using 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 apply for, pay, for, and track their permit. The portal will also allow for the tracking of submittals and plan revisions needed for approval. 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 explicitly highlight the connection between the work of MCWD and its partners to protect healthy natural spaces, and the recreational enjoyment this creates. The 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.

### **Content plan**

The attached website content plan defines the key content needed to achieve the goals of each section and sets out ground rules for design, copywriting, and coding. Note that design and copywriting decisions will occur during Phase II; the colors, sizing, and specific wording included in the content plan diagrams does not reflect the look of the eventual site.

### **Supporting documents:**

Phase I Content Plan



**RESOLUTION**

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**Resolution number:** 20-088

**Title: Adoption of Phase I Website Content Strategy**

- WHEREAS in 2019 the MCWD Board of Managers, recognizing the need to re-build MCWD's website that is currently nearly 10 years old, approved resolution 19-026 authorizing the release of an RFP for consultant services to assist the District in creating a content strategy for the website;
- WHEREAS in 2019 the MCWD Board of Managers adopted resolution 19-060 authorizing staff to execute a contract for a website redesign consultant, Vendi Advertising;
- WHEREAS in 2020 the Board adopted Resolution 20-018 establishing a new strategic direction for the Outreach program, calling for an emphasis on supporting the high-impact, interpersonal outreach that is primarily carried out by MCWD program staff and most directly impacts the District's ability to serve its residents by building high-impact capital projects that improve the health of the watershed;
- WHEREAS this strategic direction recognizes that the website must complement this shift in focus by automating common requests for information by effectively connecting users to the information they want and need, while also highlighting MCWD's brand position;
- WHEREAS throughout 2019 and 2020, District staff and Vendi led an intensive input process that included
- A deep-dive on current website analytics
  - An online survey of our web users
  - Focus groups with web users
  - Work sessions with the Citizens Advisory Committee
  - Large-group work sessions with staff and CAC liaisons
  - A series of weekly work sessions with staff and Vendi
  - A pair of discussions with the Board of Managers Operations and Program Committee in September and October 2020
  - A presentation to the Board of Managers on November 19, 2020;
- WHEREAS this process resulted in the Phase I website content strategy report which serves as the blueprint for designing, copywriting, and building the new website in the second phase of the project;
- WHEREAS the MCWD Board of Managers has reviewed the content strategy and finds it to align with and support the implementation of its overarching outreach strategy;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Board of Managers adopts the Phase I website content strategy as the foundation for the eventual Phase II design and build.

Resolution Number 20-088 was moved by Manager \_\_\_\_\_, seconded by Manager \_\_\_\_\_. Motion to adopt the resolution \_\_\_ ayes, \_\_\_ nays, \_\_\_ abstentions. Date: 12/3/2020

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Secretary Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT  
WEBSITE**

Site map, flow chart, features and content strategy foundation

**OCTOBER 02, 2020**  
Final report

# VENDI WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT LIFETRACK



**PHASE ONE:  
PLANNING**




**PHASE TWO:  
CREATIVE**



**PHASE THREE:  
DEVELOP**



**PHASE FOUR:  
LAUNCH**



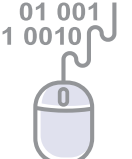
**PROJECT KICKOFF**

- Project review
- Timeline
- Roles




**CONCEPTS**

- Site design
- Component design
- Prototypes



**CODE**

- CMS build out
- Data integration




**TESTING**

- Browser
- Device




**DISCOVERY**

- Audit
- Research
- Competitive analysis
- Goals
- User personas




**CONTENT DEVELOPMENT**

- Copywriting
- Photography
- Video
- SEO meta data



**ACCESSIBILITY**

- WCAG
- Testing




**TRAINING**

- Manual
- CMS training



**CORE MODEL WORKSHOP**

- Engagement path
- Content themes
- Priority content
- Features and functions
- Site map




**ASSETS**

- Testimonials
- Resources
- Maps
- Infographics




**CONTENT**

- Migration
- Populate




**MAINTENANCE**

- Security
- SEO optimization
- Development
- Analytics
- User engagement tracking



**CONTENT STRATEGY**

- SEO focus keywords
- Voice
- Data model



**USABILITY**

- Testing

# GOALS AND STRATEGY

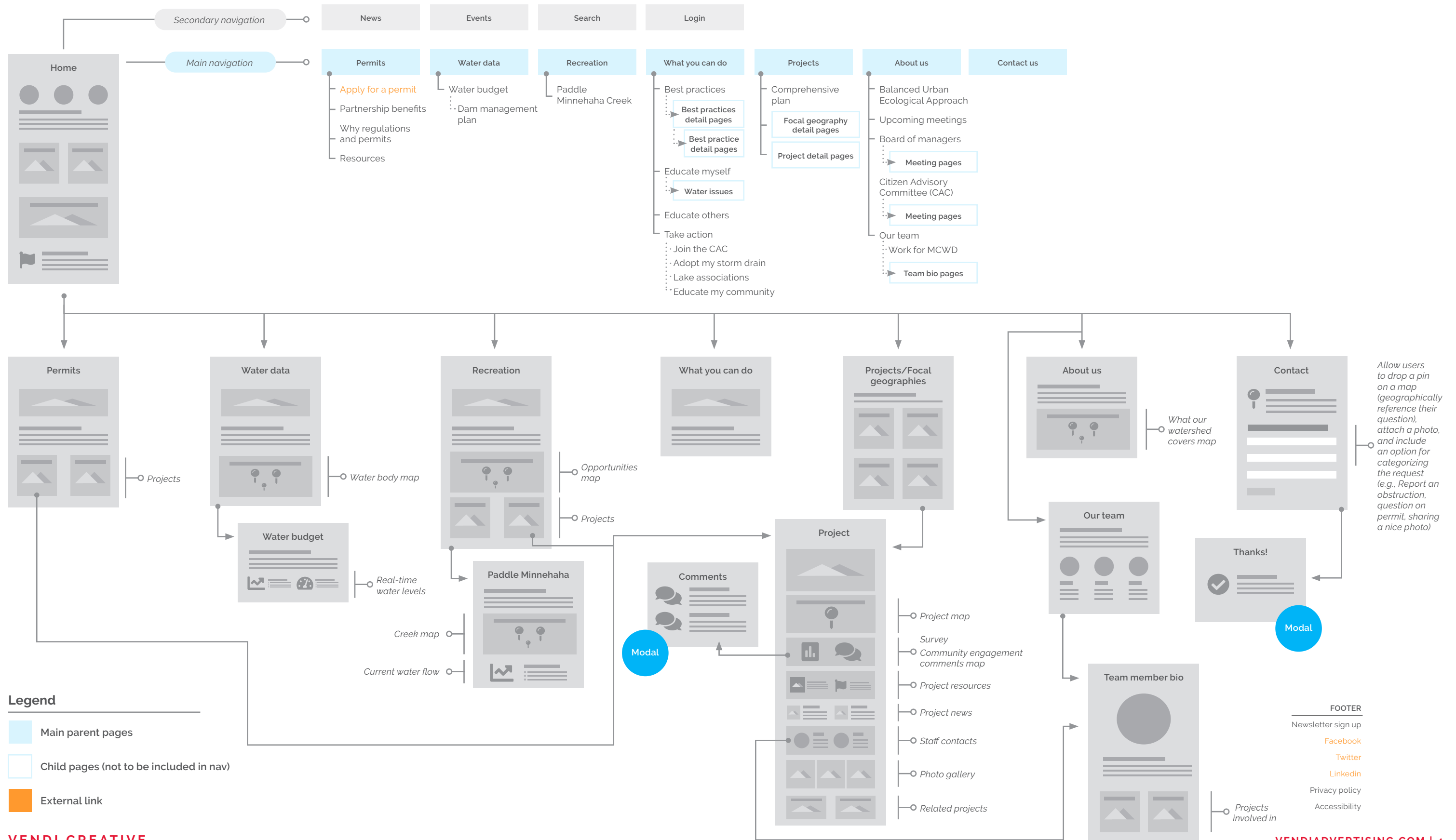
## Business goals

- Automate common requests for information by effectively connecting people to information they value
- Highlight the value Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) delivers
- Provide transparency and organizational information
- Uncover opportunities for strategic partnerships

## User goals

- Get a permit
- Recreate in the watershed
- Take action to protect clean water
- Learn about a water body that is relevant to them
- Access organizational information about MCWD
- Learn about a project that is relevant to them

# Site map | flow chart | feature recommendations





# PERMITS SECTION

## Core model workshop results - content priorities

- Decision tree — Am I in the watershed? Which city? What kind of project? Which benefits of partnering apply? Leading to action steps segmented by type of project (SFH, commercial, dock, shoreline)
  - Do I need a permit based on my circumstances/project details? If so, which one? What are the associated costs, processes, requirements?
- Permit processes and timelines
- Education — why a permit is necessary, why we regulate, what we regulate compared to other organizations
- Partnering with MCWD — case studies/success stories of early coordination with MCWD

## Outside influencers

- In-person meetings
- Interpersonal communications
- Referrals — citizen groups, other related organizations, city websites
- MCWD communications — newsletters, postcards, social, digital ads
- Organic search

## Ideas to explore

- Partner program
- Partner pledge (community members, developers) - support badge or signage that can be applied for
- Permits map
- Project packet — packet creation wizard to determine document needs for project, download project packet/checklist

## Content strategy foundation

### Permits main page

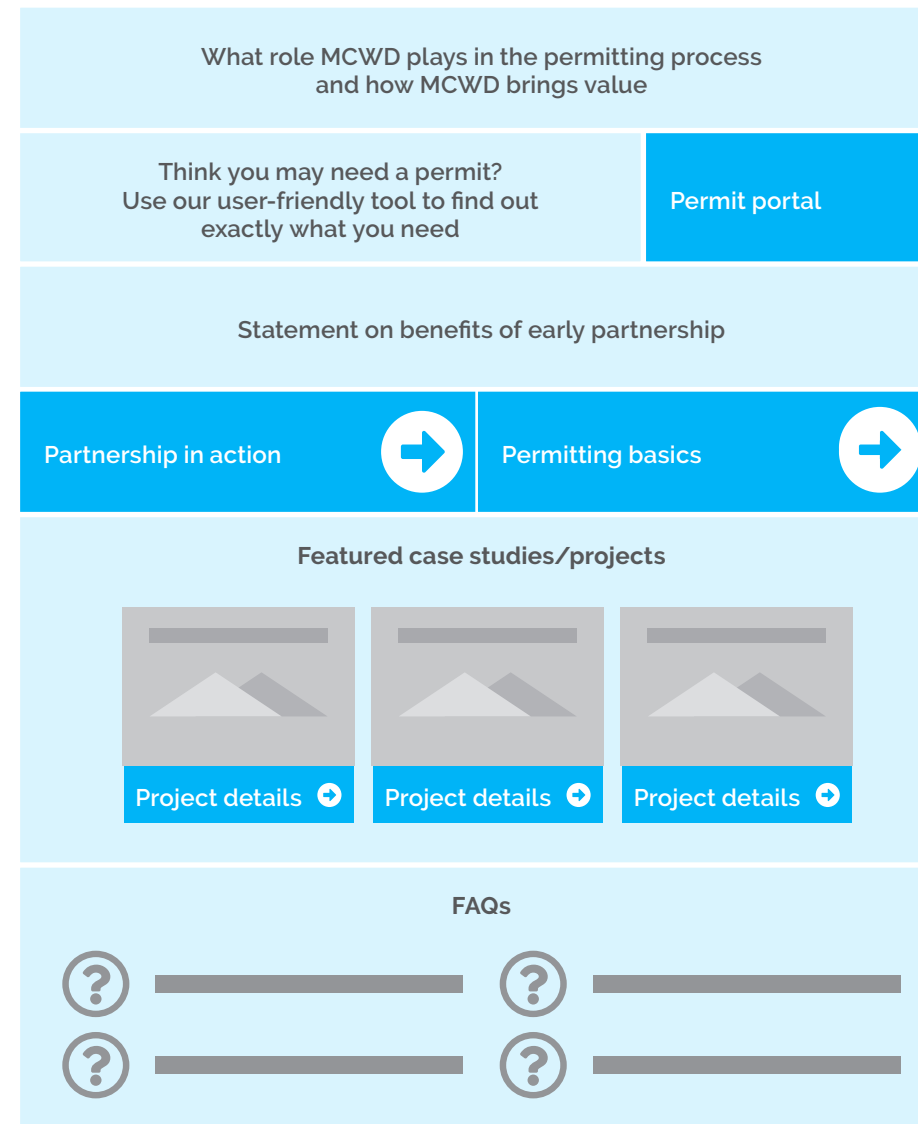
#### Business goals

- Help users easily learn about and apply for permits
- Minimize opportunities for conflict in the permitting process
- Make process more streamlined/friendlier overall
- Promote early coordination with district and communicate value to applicant
- Clearly communicate permitting process
- Direct non-MCWD partners and permit seekers to appropriate agency
- Minimize "hand holding"

#### User goals

- Apply for permit
- Learn when and why a permit is needed
- Learn about permit rules and fees
- Understand status of permit/permitting process, access customized information about "my permit"
- Learn about or comment on another permit (significant or controversial projects)
- Submit inquiries and comments/complaints about: existing permits or projects, perceived needs and/or perceived violations from others in the District
- Partner with MCWD

#### Permits navigation



## Content strategy foundation

Partnership benefits page

### Permits navigation

- Permits
- Apply for a permit
- Partnership benefits
- Why regulations and permits
- Resources

MCWD's approach to responsive partnership

Partnership benefits

Partnership success stories

Schedule partnership consultation

Balanced Urban Ecology approach

Featured case studies

Developer partnership

Municipal partnership

Landowner partnership

## Content strategy foundation


### Why a permit page

#### Permits navigation

- Permits
- Apply for a permit
- Partnership benefits
- Why regulations and permits
- Resources


Why a permit is necessary

Think you may need a permit?  
Use our user-friendly tool to find out exactly what you need




Permit portal 




Why we regulate permits

What are the costs and requirements

Pre-application meeting request 

Featured case studies/projects

Project details  Project details  Project details 

# WATER DATA AND RECREATION SECTIONS

## Core model workshop results - content priorities

- Report real-time conditions on the creek and other water bodies
- Real-time water levels and flow
- Information on the health/characteristics of the water body of interest to the user
- Flooding outlook (when applicable)
- Information about Gray's Bay Dam
- Education
  - Understand goals, issues, priorities for each water body/subwatershed and how they all work together
- Information on paddling Minnehaha Creek
- Conditions of recreational assets

## Outside influencers

- External resources
  - Funding for AIS management
  - LMCD water restrictions for recreation
- What you can do section
- Project portfolio section

## Ideas to explore

- Leverage infographics or video animation for education
  - How Gray's Bay Dam works
  - Where water goes when it hits your roof or driveway
- Create water condition alerts sign up

## Content strategy foundation

### Recreation main page

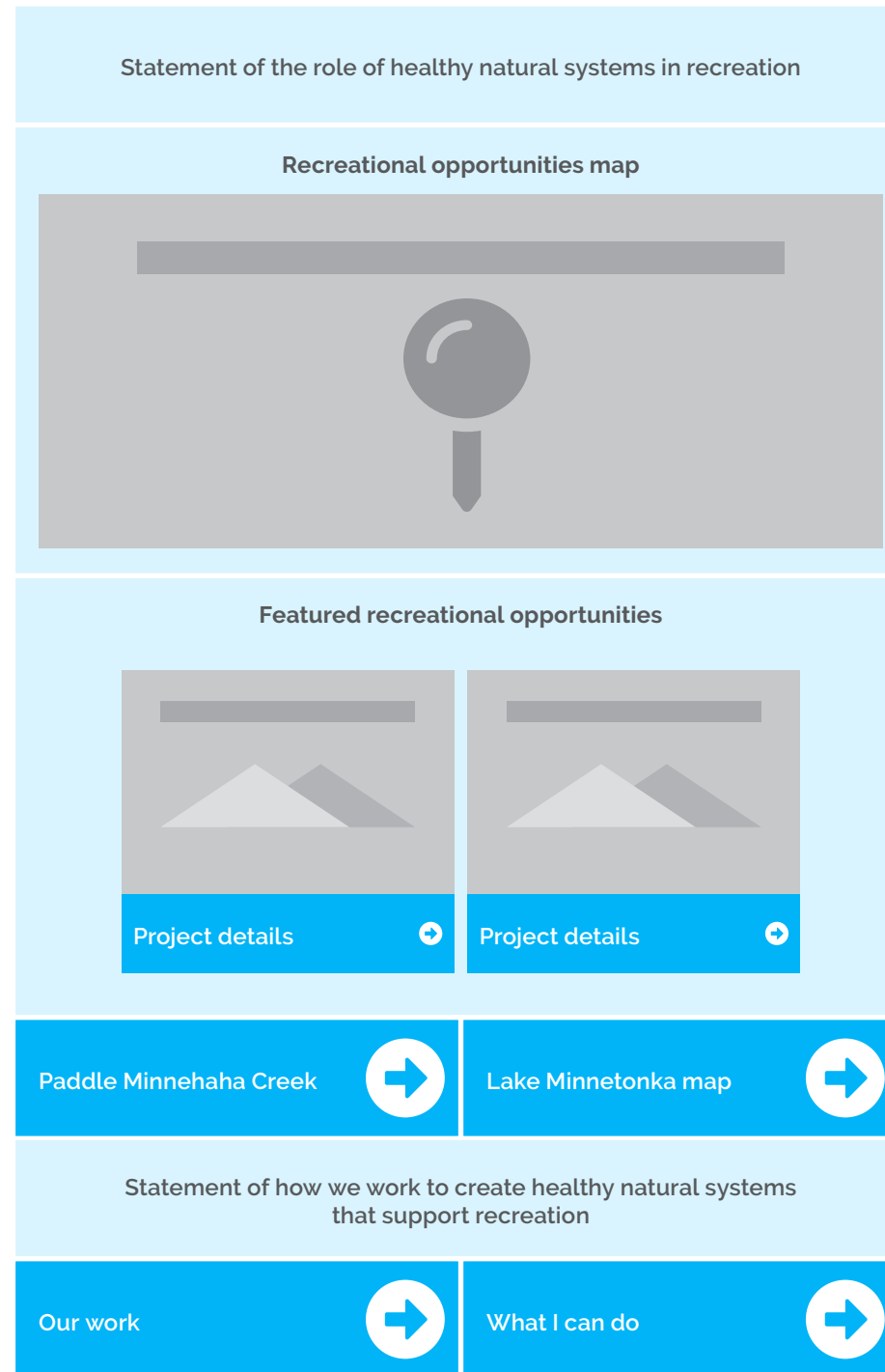
#### Business goals

- Answer common requests for water data (to help reduce the number of calls to MCWD)
- Enhance water planning initiatives
- Support outreach initiatives
- Provide and clarify information we regularly collect
- Promote best practices
- Provide education/manage expectations

#### User goals

- Learn about the water body I care about
- Understand flooding risk
- Plan recreation around water conditions
- Provide business professionals with data specific to their project

#### Recreation navigation



Recreation highlights include:

- Trails
- Paddling
- Regional parks
- Beaches
- Boat launches

Each item includes forward path to:

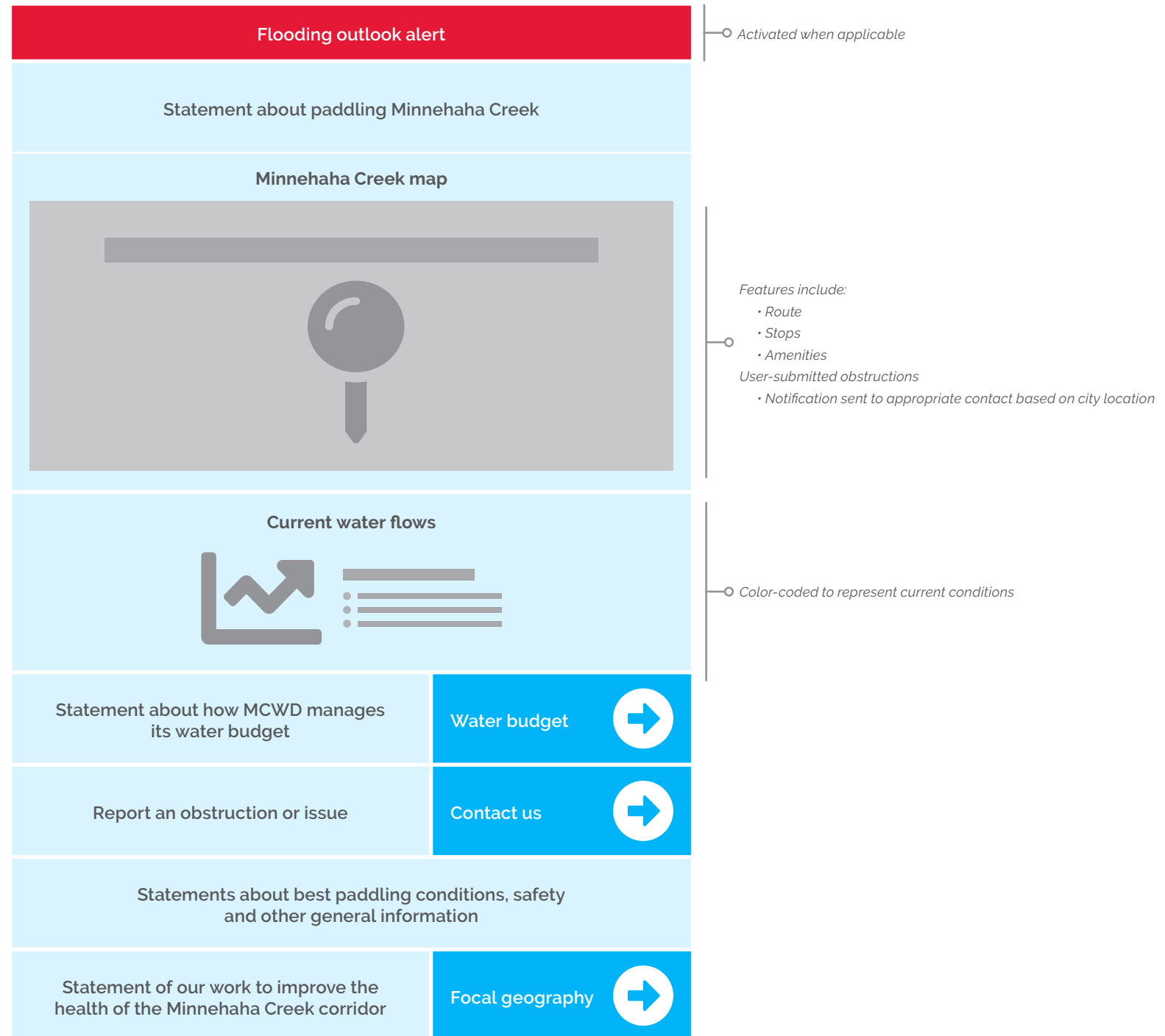
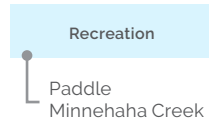
- Information page hosted by the appropriate agency
- Water data listing for nearby water body

Highlight 2 projects with strong recreational aspects

## Content strategy foundation

Paddle Minnehaha Creek page

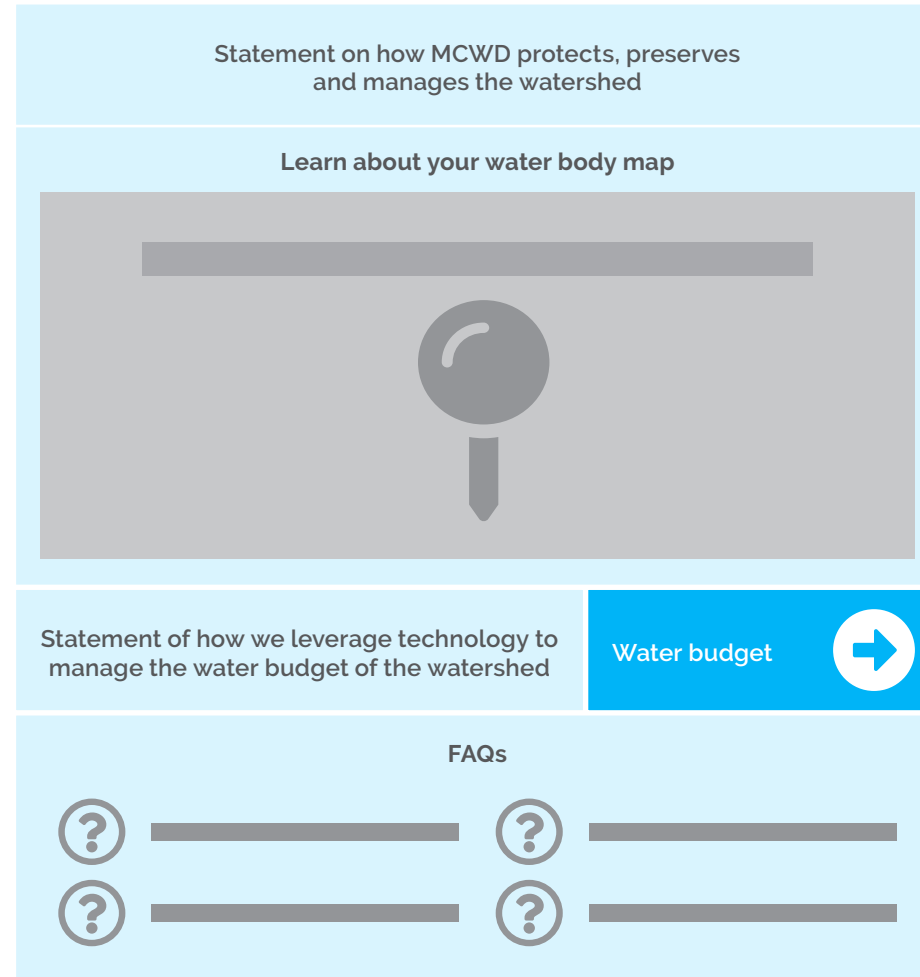
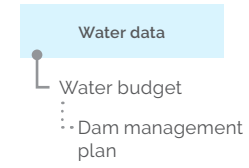
### Recreation navigation



## Content strategy foundation

### Water data main page

#### Water data navigation



- Clickable water bodies  
Details include:
- Water quality facts
  - Subwatershed - forward path to comp plan
  - Lake association (when applicable)
  - Link to DNR LakeFinder
  - Link to MPCA water quality database listing

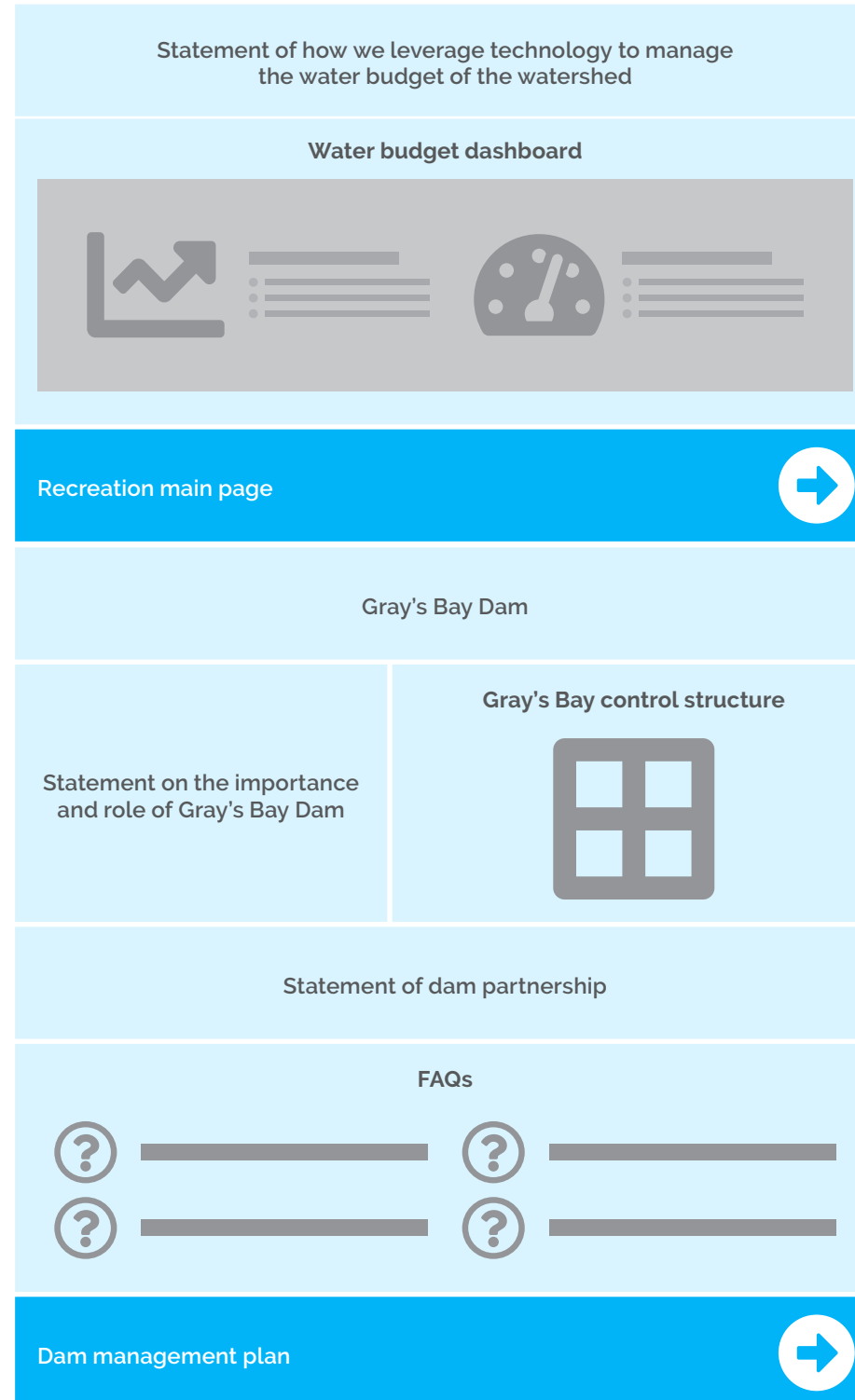
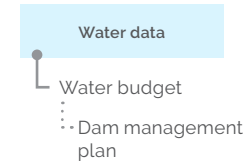
- Topics covered could include:
- Water quality
  - Water conditions



## Content strategy foundation

### Water budget page

### Water data navigation



○ Real-time water levels fed by RESNET sensor network

○ Current dam discharge, displayed overlaid on the "operating zones" graphic

# WHAT YOU CAN DO SECTION

## Core model workshop results - content priorities

- Resource hub/library
  - Information about implementing best practices
  - Resources for grants from partners
  - Information about joining citizen groups
  - Toolkits
  - Collaboration with other watershed organizations (if/when applicable)
- Automate display reservation process

## Outside influencers

- Implement a best practice
- Join a resident group
- Apply for a grant
- Explore third-party resources/external organizations for opportunities to volunteer, get involved

## Ideas to explore

- Best practices video series
  - Managing storm water
  - How to build a rain garden

## Content strategy foundation

What you can do main page

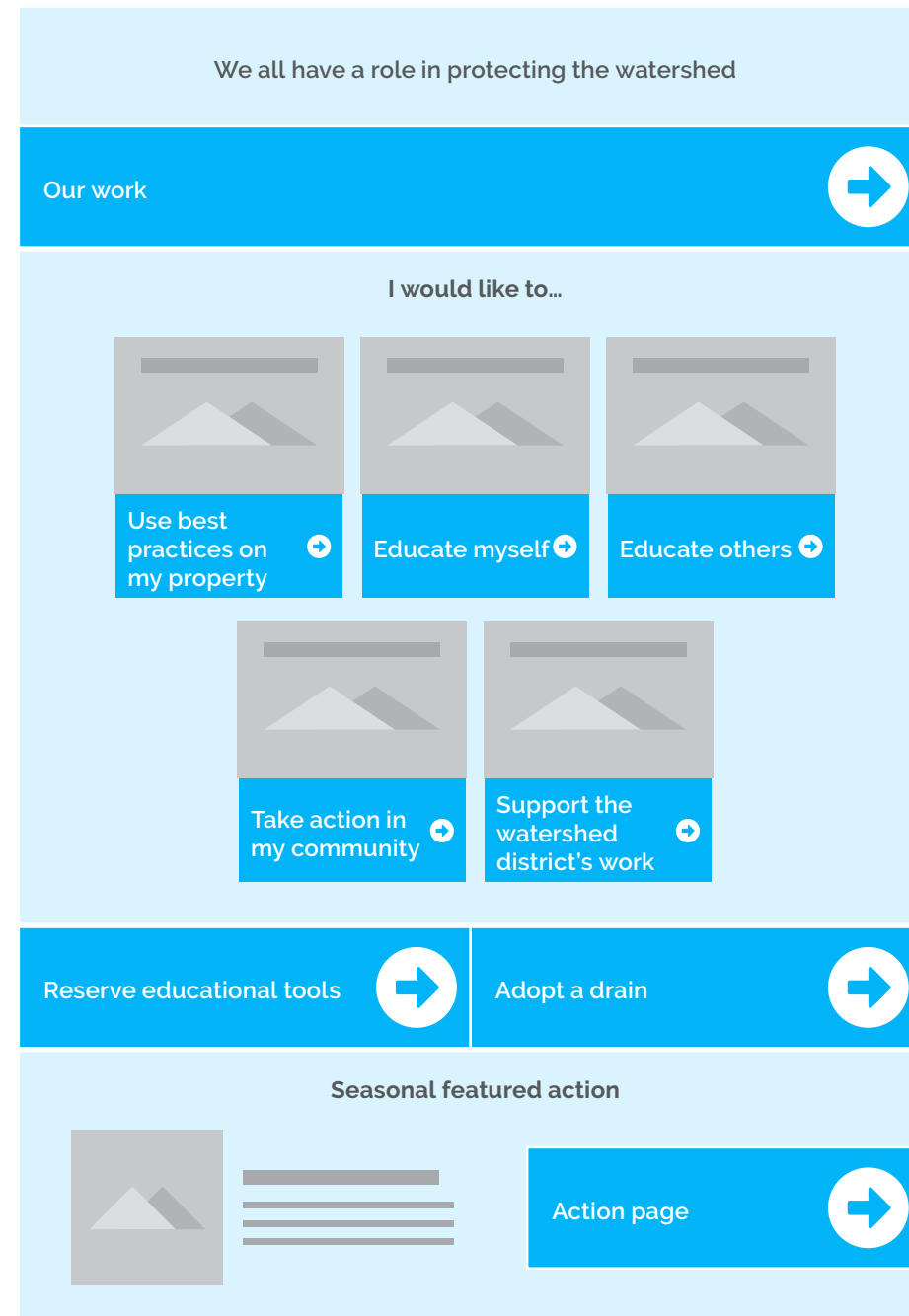
### Business goals

- Guide residential best practices
- Provide info on how to get involved
- Provide resource and referrals
- Promote partnership across agencies/developers/residents (connect to useful third-party resources)

### User goals

- What actions can I take?
- How can I get involved?
- What additional resources can I explore?

### What you can do navigation



Describing how the role of the public complements the role of the District

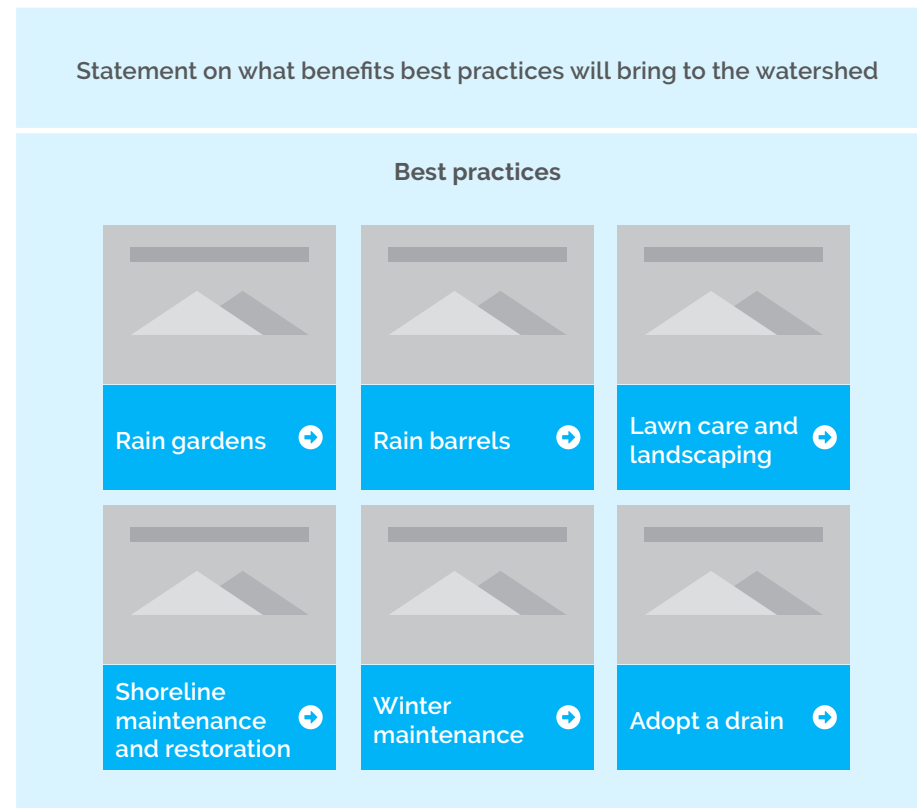
Seasonal action will rotate based on current month

## Content strategy foundation

Best practices detail page

e.g. Use best practices on my property

## What you can do navigation

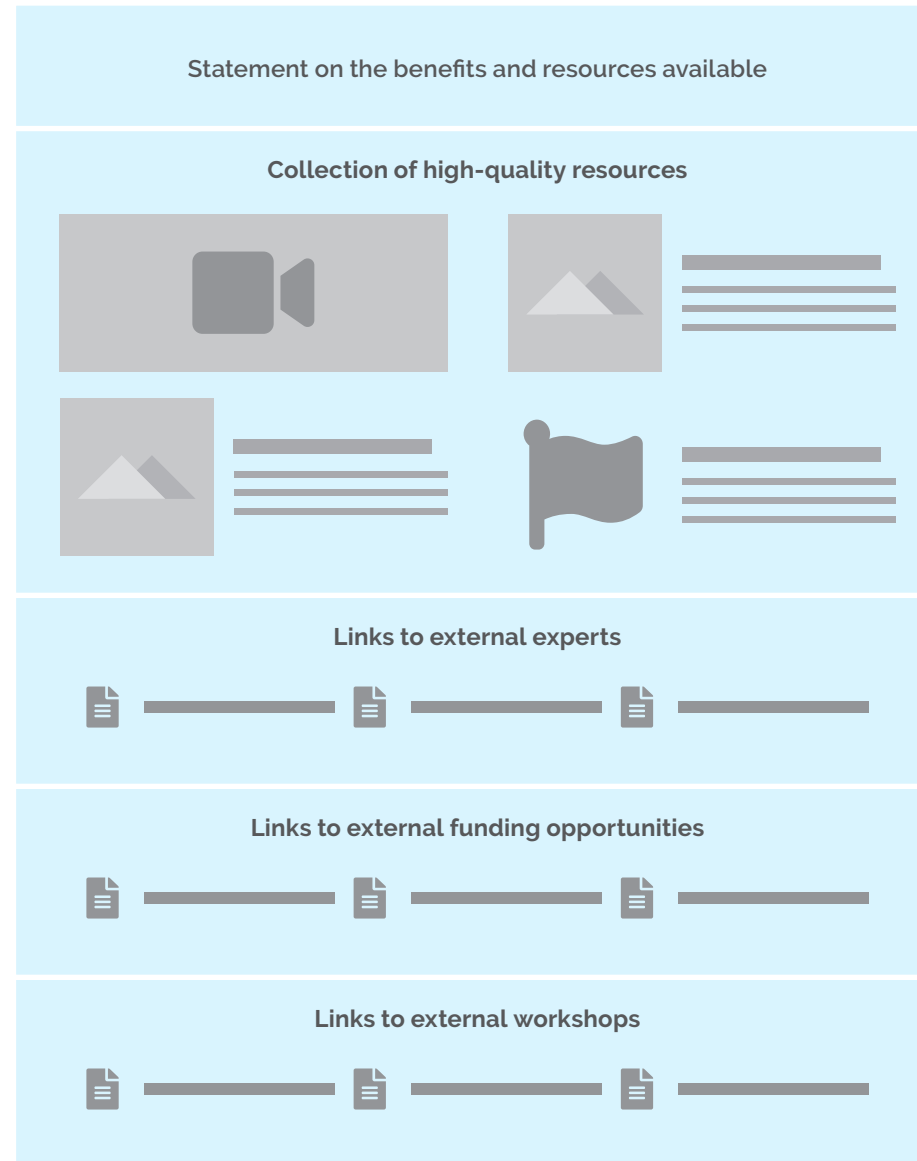


## Content strategy foundation

Best practice detail page

e.g. Rain gardens

### What you can do navigation



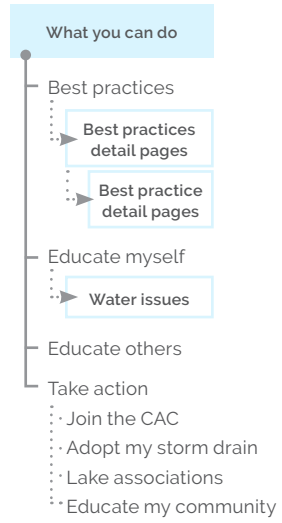
Examples:  
• Certified rain garden installers  
• Winter maintenance professionals

When applicable

# Content strategy foundation

## Educate myself page

### What you can do navigation



Statement on learning about the watershed and issues it faces

### Water issues

What is a watershed?

Water governance

Stormwater pollutants

Climate change and water

Learn about a specific water body

Learn about taking action on your property

Attend a workshop or event

Balanced Urban Ecology

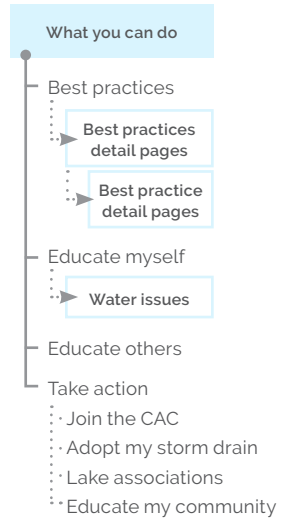
Forward paths to key water issues

Only displayed when active upcoming events are posted

# Content strategy foundation

Educate others page

## What you can do navigation



Statement on how you can educate others to help MCWD protect the watershed

### Resources for educators

### Resources for community members

Mix of resources

- Sample curriculum
- External links to classroom speakers
- Other external resources
- Forward path to display/activity/resource check out

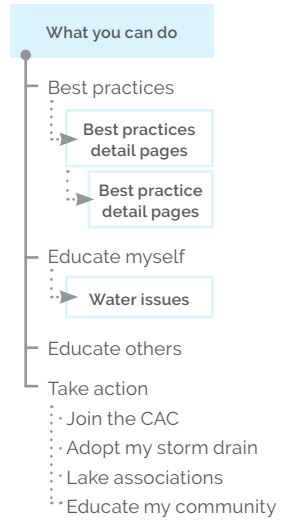
Mix of resources

- Fact sheets on water issues and what you can do
- Videos
- etc.

## Content strategy foundation

Take action in my community page

### What you can do navigation



Statement on supporting the watershed through various outlets like programs, committees and volunteering

### Take action in my community

Join the CAC	Adopt my storm drain
Join or form a lake association	Educate my community at an event

Support the watershed's work

Attend a local event



# ABOUT MCWD SECTION

## Content priorities

- Mission, district goals
- Authority/why they exist
- How MCWD is different from other agencies (DNR, city, county)
- Ongoing public outreach strategy
- Highlight key case studies/projects
- History (brief)
- Budget/levy
- Agendas/minutes
- "Am I in the watershed?" search functionality
- Comp plan
- Requests for applications and proposals
- Job postings
- Board of Managers
- MCWD staff
- Committees, task forces and commissions
- Publications/annual report/strategic plans

## Outside influencers

- Community outreach
- Concerned citizens
- Media coverage
- Social

## Ideas to explore

- Elevate key staff members, include more information about what they do
- Video - overview of MCWD

## Content strategy foundation

About us main page

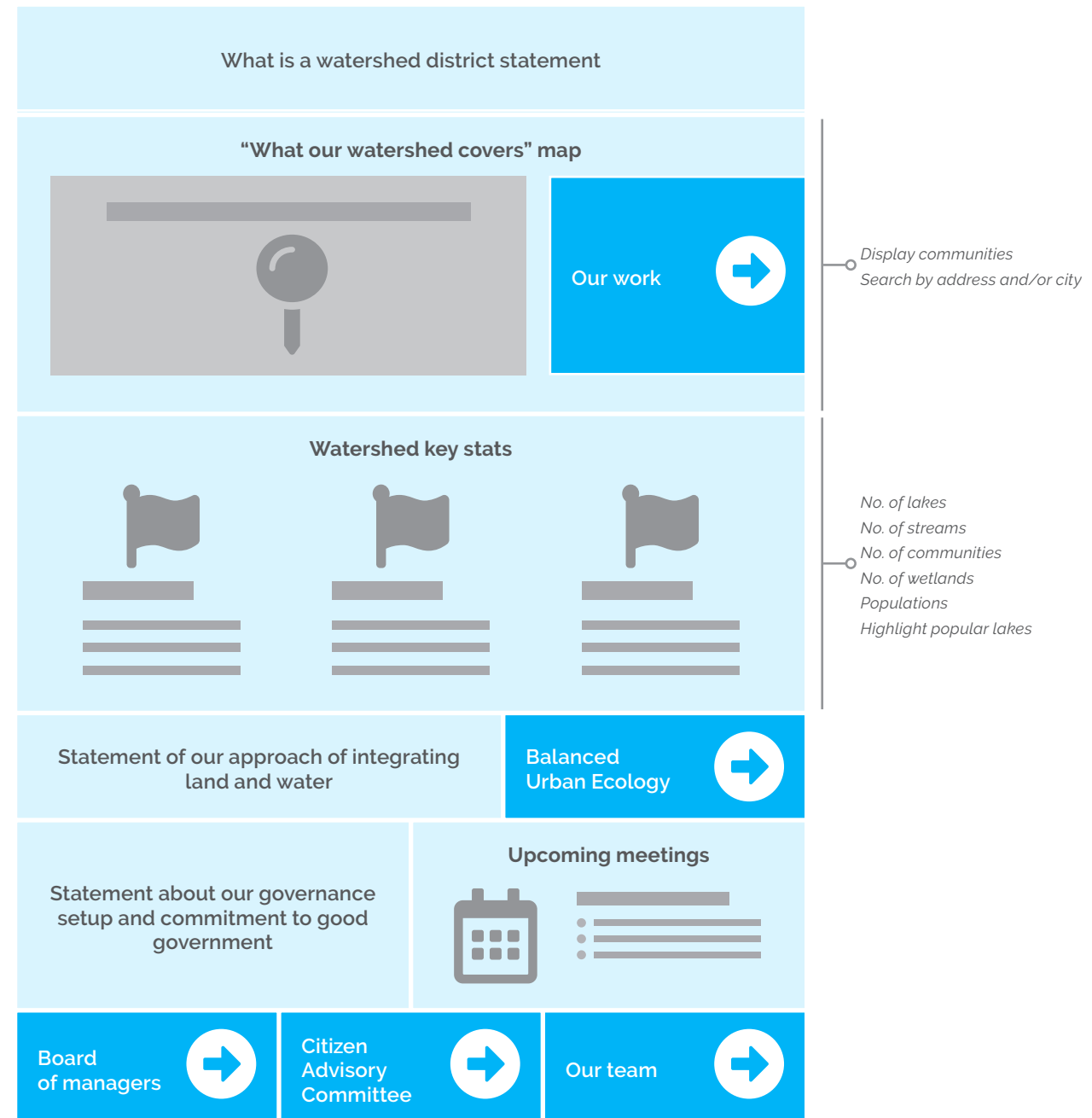
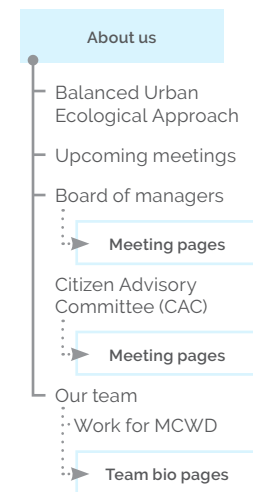
### Business goals

- Inform public and private sectors of ongoing missions and goals
- Provide public transparency

### User goals

- Learn about MCWD

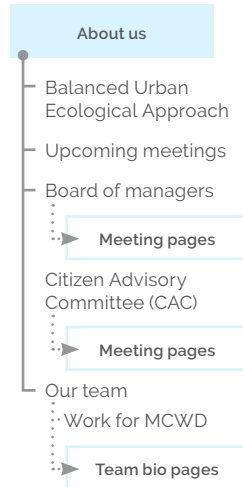
### About us navigation



## Content strategy foundation

Balanced Urban Ecology Approach page

### About us navigation



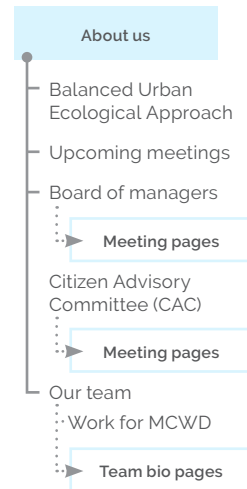
A content strategy foundation diagram for the Balanced Urban Ecology Approach page. It consists of several stacked sections:

- Statement on managing the watershed's resources within a broader ecological context** (light blue background)
- Detailed description of BUE** (light blue background)
- BUE policy statement** (dark blue background with a white right-pointing arrow icon)
- Focal geographies** (light blue background)
  - Statement about our focal geography approach
  - Two placeholder images for focal geographies, each with a blue bar at the bottom containing the text 'Focal geography #1' and 'Focal geography #2' respectively, and a white right-pointing arrow icon.
- Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan** (dark blue background with a white right-pointing arrow icon)

# Content strategy foundation

## Board of managers page

### About us navigation

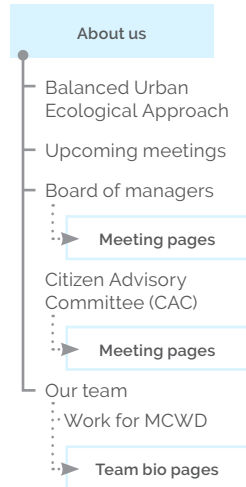


The page layout is divided into three horizontal sections. The top section is a light blue header with the text 'Statement on managers overseeing district activities and protecting water quality and preventing flooding'. The middle section is also light blue and titled 'Board members'. It features two large grey circles representing profile pictures, each with three horizontal lines below it representing a name. The bottom section is light blue and titled 'Meeting information'. It contains a grid of nine document icons arranged in three rows and three columns. To the right of this grid is a vertical line with a small circle at the top, followed by the text 'Links to meeting pages' and 'Filter by:' with two bullet points: '• Year' and '• Meeting type'.

# Content strategy foundation

## Citizen Advisory Committee page

### About us navigation



Statement on CAC's role in the district

CAC members

Meeting information

Join the Citizen Advisory Committee

More ways to get involved

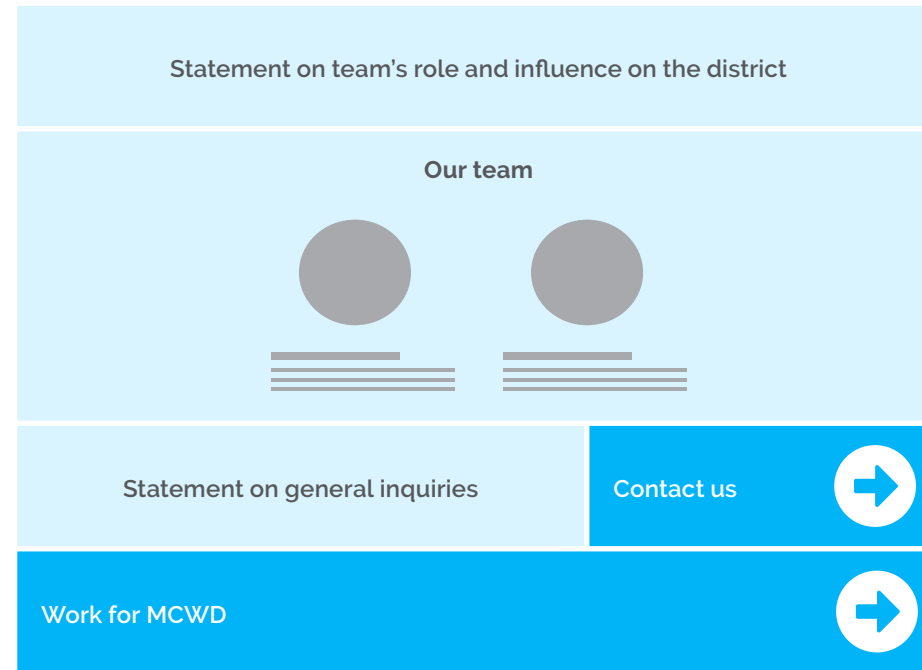
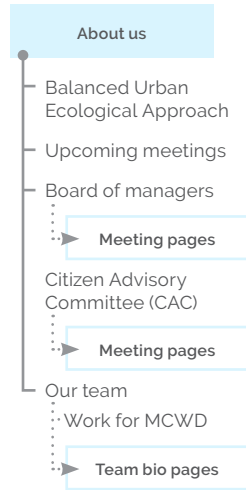
Take Action in my Community

Links to meeting pages  
Filter by:  
• Year

# Content strategy foundation

## Our team page

### About us navigation



Organized by program  
• Program sections to include a brief description  
Link to team bio page

# PROJECTS SECTION

## Content priorities

- Ability to filter project list/presentation by:
  - Project type
  - Residential/commercial (user type)
  - Subwatershed
  - Status
  - City
- Intro section
  - Short explanation of how & why MCWD is involved with projects —“feel-good” content
  - Key (or highlighted) projects, recently completed
- Project map
- Outreach
  - Informational materials
  - News and press releases
  - Project update emails/communications
  - Information for people who live nearby and may have also received a postcard
  - What to expect as a business or resident near a planned or in-progress project
  - Sign up for alerts/updates on this project
- Location search — see nearby projects
- Project status
  - Completed projects
  - Projects in progress
- Permits issued
- Project overview
  - Project timeline
  - Goal of the project
  - Followup, results
    - Ex. Increased property value/aesthetics, reduced AIS (would want filtered by user type to show relevant outcomes)
  - How this project benefits the watershed and the public
  - MCWD staff contacts for project
  - Associated/related projects

- Success stories highlighted
- Partners and contractors
- Related water body
- Reports/related documents
- Studies, etc.
- Ability to feature significant projects

## Outside influencers

- Community outreach
- Public forum
- Concerned citizens
- Partner with us section of the website
- News articles

## Ideas to explore

- Icon system
- Robust search and filter functionality
  - Leverage categories/topics/tags
- Project highlights/summary — elevate key project details for an “at a glance” view
- Case study approach to content

## Content strategy foundation

Projects main page

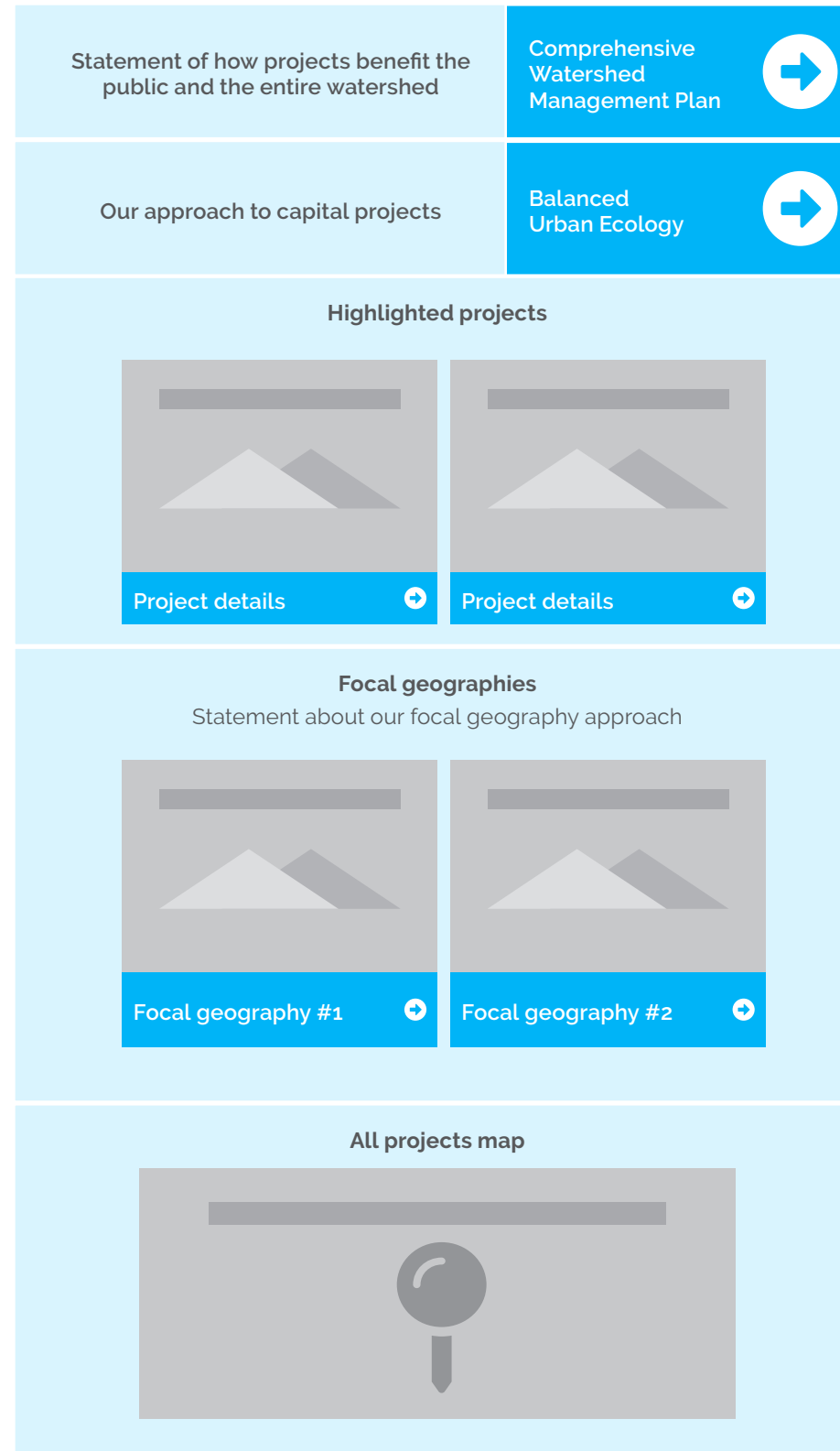
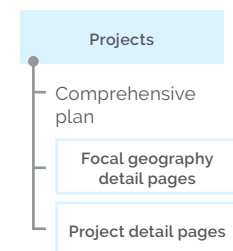
### Business goals

- Keep users up to date and educated on current and past projects
- Gain stakeholder & public support
- Promote partnership opportunities by showing relevant success stories and positioning MCWD as the area's expert in water management

### User goals

- Updates
- Impacts
- Benefits

### Projects navigation



A landing page for each of the 1-3 active focal geographies in MCWD

Filter projects by:

- Status
  - Planned
  - In progress
  - Completed
- Partnership type
  - Government
  - Developer
  - Business
  - Private landowner

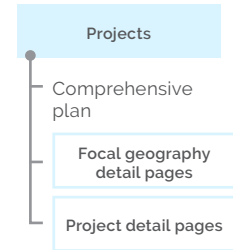
View projects by map or tile view



# Content strategy foundation

## Project detail page

### Projects navigation



Brief description of how the project is part of a larger effort to improve a particular subwatershed or water body

Blocks would be turned on and off at various points of a project's life cycle

### Hero banner

### Project-at-a-glance summary

### Statement of why this project is happening

### Project by the numbers

### Project background narrative

#### Statement of subwatershed context

[More about this subwatershed](#)

[The focal geography \(if applicable\)](#)

### Project map

#### Project survey

#### Community engagement map

#### Key partners

[Partner with MCWD](#)

- Highlights can include:
- City
  - Subwatershed
  - Completion date
  - Current status
  - Cost
  - Funding sources
  - Partners
- Leverage icon system
- Key metric icons
  - No. jobs created
  - Lbs. carp removed
  - Lbs. algae prevented
- Directs users to the corresponding section of the Comprehensive Plan

GIS map outlining project boundaries

- Community engagement includes:
- Real-time comments on project portion
  - Link to public engagement session(s)

### Dynamic project timeline

Project start Project end

### Photo gallery

### Project resources

### Project news

### Staff contact(s)

### Related projects

[Related project #1](#)

[Related project #2](#)

Custom admin workflow reminders to staff to update content

Mix of content

- Reports
- PDF downloads
- Videos

Mix of internal and external news

- Construction updates
- Community engagement opportunities
- Etc.

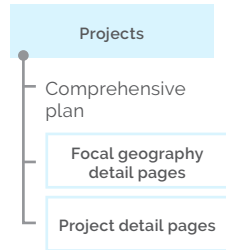
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# Content strategy foundation

## Focal geography detail page

### Projects navigation



**Hero banner**

**Opportunity statement: Why we are focused on this area**

**Statement of MCWD's focal geography approach** **Focal geography 2** →

**Project by the numbers**

**Sign up for updates on this focal geography** →

**Map of work within focal geography map**

**Key partners** **Partner with MCWD** →

**Focal geography resources**

- Highlights can include:
  - City
  - Subwatershed
  - Completion date
  - Current status
  - Cost
  - Funding sources
  - Partners
- Leverage icon system
- Highlights of outcomes

GIS map displaying all the project pages within the subwatershed

- Mix of content
  - Reports
  - PDF downloads
  - Videos

**Staff contact(s)**

# CONTENT STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS & GUIDELINES

## Overall voice

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) website should speak to visitors in a friendly, understandable way, regardless of subject matter. Much of MCWD's subject matter is highly technical and scientific in nature, but all visitors appreciate direct, easy-to-read/scannable content. A significant number of visitors will possess only limited/basic knowledge of water parameters, watersheds and watershed projects.

Additionally, research shows the average visitor most appreciates content that is delivered at a seventh- to eighth-grade level, so keep content simple and straightforward to reach the most people. We recommend applying the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Test or another readability tool to each page to determine the level of difficulty within your words and sentences. The tool also identifies whether content is written in active voice, which is a desirable quality. If your content registers as difficult to read or in passive voice, you may wish to edit it for better comprehension and retention. Readability tests/tools are often integrated into content management systems and may also be found online.

## Overall tone

MCWD has worked to protect and support the health and longevity of the District's water resources since 1967. And with more than 50 years of experience, MCWD has earned a well-deserved reputation as a true authority within the District and overall region.

Content presented within the website must reflect MCWD's authoritative, expert status without confusing or talking down to visitors. Content must also emphasize MCWD's commitment to creating solutions, preventing problems and increasing awareness of both planned and existing water resource solutions/projects.

## Copywriting guidelines

Adopt a comprehensive style guide such as the AP Stylebook or Chicago Manual of Style. Then, develop and follow a customized-content style guide that defines District-related common usage or exceptions such as:

- Preferred voice
- Preferred tones
- General guidelines
- Recommended/preferred terms, such as these examples:
  - residents vs. landowners
  - communities vs. cities or towns
  - permit vs. license
- Preferred capitalization for headings, lists, etc.
  - Title Capped
  - Sentence capped
- Common spelling errors to avoid, such as these examples:
  - Grey's Bay vs. Gray's Bay
  - hydrodata vs. hydro data
- Preferred punctuation, such as:
  - No periods at the end of bulleted list entries
  - Use of the serial comma
  - When to use en and em dashes vs. dashes/hyphens
- When to use numerals or words for numbers within content
- Parallel structure within a list (starting all entries in the list with either a verb or a noun, not mixing the two)
- Additional matters specific to MCWD

NEVER assume your users/viewers understand "the who, what, when, where, or why" of MCWD.

- Don't demonstrate your advanced knowledge with big words or complex descriptions
- Don't use industry-specific acronyms without first spelling them out/providing their full description (acronyms on secondary references are fine)
- Aim to answer questions—rather than create them—with everything you present within the website

Strive to provide content that anticipates and addresses your users' needs based on the way they are thinking at that point in time.

Keep copy brief and use short sentences. Write copy that's just long enough to clearly communicate crucial details. Include only the necessary details or risk overwhelming your visitors and losing their interest/attention.

Keep copy factual and direct, but not dry. Visitors want engaging content. Write with enthusiasm and authority.

## Copywriting guidelines continued

Make copy reader-friendly ALWAYS. Visitors have neither the time nor the desire to read paragraph after paragraph of narrative copy. Too-long copy overwhelms readers and causes them to lose interest.

- Break copy up into "chunks" with subheads, photos and/or graphic elements like divider lines—think about what you'd want to communicate if visitors read ONLY the subheads and no supporting copy
- Use bulleted lists liberally
  - Especially when describing components, processes or related thoughts
- Use bolded words and phrases where appropriate, but don't overuse them

Write in active voice vs. passive voice to keep copy engaging, easier to understand and generally shorter. Consider these examples:

- Minnehaha Creek Watershed District staff compiled the report. (Active voice)
- The report was compiled by Minnehaha Creek Watershed District staff. (Passive voice)

The first sentence is much friendlier, more direct and understandable.

Write in second-person perspective whenever possible. Readers gravitate more strongly to "you" and "your" statements than "we" and "our." They want to know exactly what your organization can and will do for them. Consider these two sentences about the same subject:

- Six Mile Marsh and Halstead Bay now offer you and your neighbors the beauty and serenity of 16 restored acres of wetland, increased wildlife habitat and new marsh-adjacent open space for outdoor fun.
- We restored land near Six Mile Marsh and Halstead Bay.

The first sentence impacts your audience much more strongly because it speaks directly to each reader and clearly describes how life will improve because of MCWD's efforts. The second sentence simply says that MCWD worked on this project.

Show, don't tell. Whenever possible and appropriate, communicate your ideas with infographics or other graphical elements that communicate complex ideas in a friendly format.

Avoid unnecessary repetition in content.

- Don't simply repeat the point you made in a headline or subhead in its adjacent/supporting description
- If you can link your visitor to an in-depth PDF or other resource, do so without first describing its content in great detail. Feel free to provide the document title or a statement of purpose, but don't post large portions of document content adjacent to its link.

Make calls to action straightforward, visible and accessible. Never make visitors wonder what you want them to do (Learn more, Sign up, Filter map, etc.).

Whenever possible, avoid writing headings, phrases, callouts or sentences IN ALL CAPS. Lengthy all-caps content, regardless of where it's located, is difficult to read.

## SEO considerations

Thoughtful Search Engine Optimization (SEO) ensures that MCWD's website ranks highly in search engine results. When a site is optimized for SEO, search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing regard it as more relevant than similar sites and display it higher in the list of search results. Higher ranking increases the likelihood that viewers will see and click through to your website. MCWD should consider SEO an ongoing project, since website optimization will change and grow according to project, focus, current events and/or other factor(s).

Keywords—crucial building blocks of individual page content

- Before writing a page's content, search for and collect major relevant keywords, then plan to incorporate them into your content
- When writing content around your keywords, stay focused on the purpose/description of the page
- Need help determining which keywords are ideal? Use a search tool like Google Ads' Keyword Planner tool or SEMrush's Keyword Magic tool.

Each page within the MCWD website should include search-friendly tagging, including:

- Title tags
- Meta description tag
- Header tags
- Image alt tags
- Links and anchor text tags
- Canonical tags
- Schema tags
- Open graph meta tags

SEO software such as Yoast can help simplify search-friendly tagging.

## Visual strategy

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District website is a hub of organized data, resource material, advocacy, answers and action.

The structure, design and content should present widely accessible information, served in bite-sized chunks. The structure, navigation, visual cues and copy should make getting the information—through site search or navigation—simple and quick. The navigation should “suggest” related content of interest to encourage a deeper understanding of the mission of the District.

### Imagery

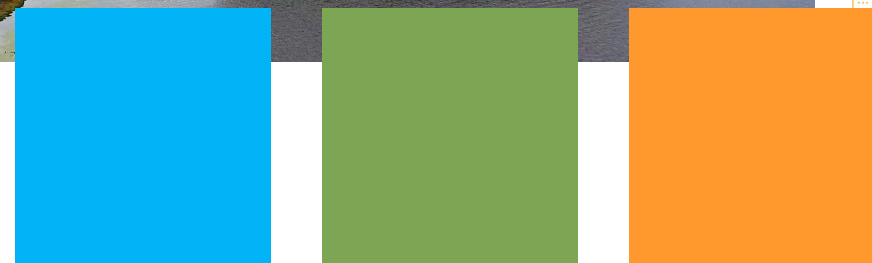
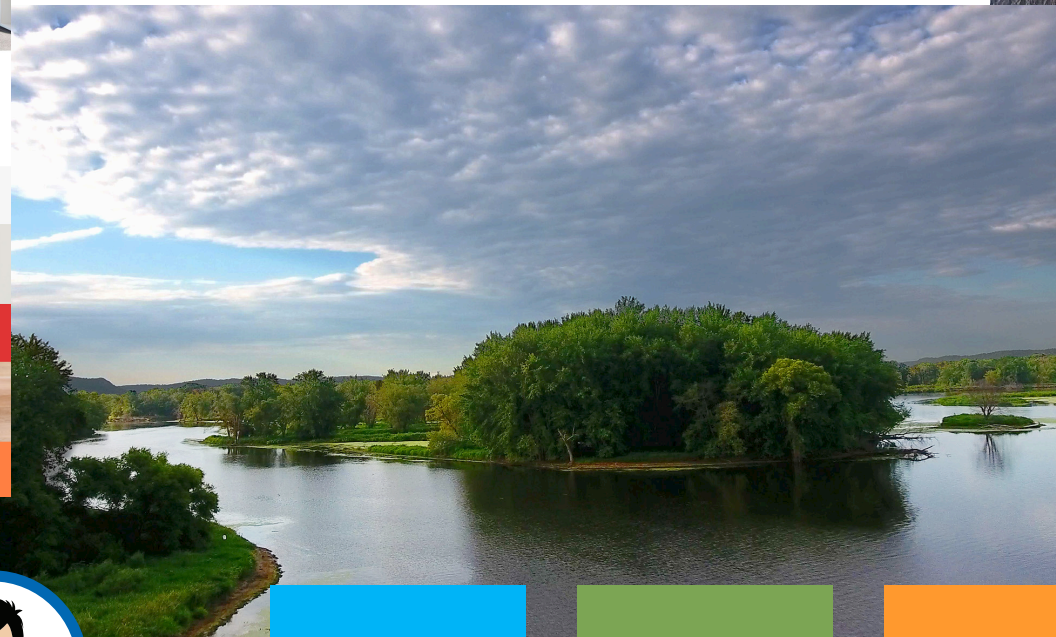
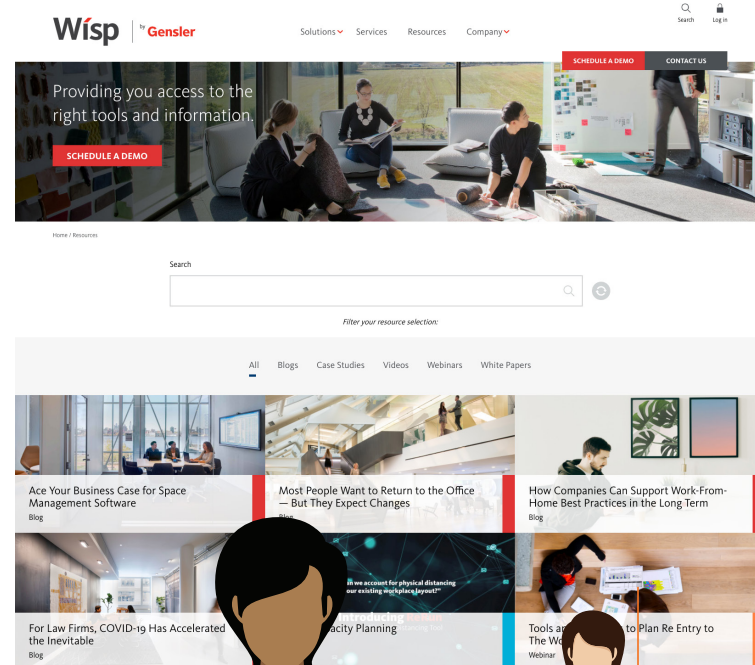
The website should bring to life the District's vision of “a landscape of vibrant communities where the natural and built environments in balance create value and enjoyment.” Visuals should tie to the environment at first glance with beautiful photography of the watershed and people enjoying completed projects.

### Color

The website should feature a color palette that reflects nature and the Districts' values. All elements should support a realistic, natural and contemporary look and feel.

### Show, don't tell

When possible, employ well-designed infographics and simple maps to provide a less text-intense experience.



A graphic with the Kaplan logo and the text "Provide in-person coaching across the organization—at scale and globally". Below the text are icons for "Inclusive learning is digital, diverse, global", "Coaches represent cultures, languages, and learning styles", and "One single, pure digital platform".