MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT

MINUTES OF THE
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

February 23, 2016

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Bob Stewart, Marvin Johnson, Emily Ziring, Patty Acomb, Lisa Whalen, Lili McMillan, Terri Yearwood, Steffanie Musich, and Gene Kay.

OTHERS PRESENT

Liz Stout, TAC Liaison; Larry Blackstad, District Consultant; Sherry Davis White, MCWD Board President; Lars Erdahl, District Administrator; James Wisker, Director of Planning & Projects; Becky Christopher, Lead Planner & Project Manager; Anna Brown, Planner & Project Manager; Katherine Sylvia, Permitting Program Lead; and Matthew Cook, Planning Assistant.

COMMITTEE MEETING

President White called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda. Ms. Christopher briefly summarized the topics discussed at the December PAC meeting. She reiterated that a central theme of the new Plan is the integration of land-use and water planning. She added that the District’s two-track approach is an implementation model intended to improve integration and that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss how the approach will work.

Two-Track Approach & Partnership Framework

Ms. Christopher provided a handout which detailed a draft list of factors the District would consider when selecting a focal geography:

- Water resource issues and impairments
- Public value of resources
- Local partnerships and support
- Known opportunities
- System scale and complexity
- Development / redevelopment pressure
- Probability of success
- Past investment by District or others

Mr. Stewart noted that past investment should not be a criterion for directing future investment, unless repeated investment is a continuation of an intentional, sustained investment plan. Ms. Christopher agreed, noting that it may even be a driver in the other direction where, if significant investment has already been made in an area, that may be a reason to focus elsewhere.
Ms. Christopher then explained that, in 2014, the Board identified the Six Mile Creek Subwatershed as a priority focal geography and reviewed the reasons why this area was selected. The Six Mile Creek subwatershed – where 58% of the land is covered by open water or wetland – includes six impaired lakes. The receiving waterbody, Halsted Bay, requires the largest load reduction of any waterbody in the District. Ms. Christopher also noted the significant development pressure in the area, which presents both a threat to the resources and an opportunity to make improvements as the land-use changes. Backed by municipal, regional, and lake organizations in the area, she concluded, the District saw Six Mile Creek subwatershed as a prime candidate for focused planning, given its high level of need, opportunity, and cooperation from stakeholders.

Ms. Brown described the planning process proposed for the Six Mile Creek subwatershed, which would serve as a model for the focal geography approach. The planning process will focus on integrating District work with local plans and priorities. Ms. Brown noted that success in this geography will require the District to seek partnerships with private developers and public agencies and ensure that plans accommodate community growth and development trajectories.

Ms. Brown then identified the process’s five main tasks:

1. Convene stakeholders
2. Understand natural resource needs
3. Understand the work of others
4. Identify intersections between natural resource and local planning priorities
5. Develop an investment plan

Ms. Brown stated that by comparing stakeholder plans and water resource needs, the District could more aptly identify opportunities to cooperate on projects and align investment. She noted that the District would weigh the opportunities identified against external funding possibilities from independent groups and government agencies at the state and national levels.

Ms. Brown added that the formal planning process laid out would be complemented by informal planning methods. She explained that the District and Six Mile Creek stakeholders would enjoy open communication to provide the District with the local context vital to remaining a responsive planning partner.

Ms. Musich asked how the District intended to assess natural resource needs. Ms. Brown responded that the District’s E-Grade program would be the main tool used to determine resource conditions and needs moving forward. She added that the District has also done both a Diagnostic Study and Carp Assessment for the area.

Ms. Brown stated that District staff and Managers were continuing to meet with policy makers in the Six Mile Creek area. Once this series of meetings was completed, she noted, the District would be hosting a kick-off meeting in April to begin the formal planning process for the subwatershed. Ms. Christopher added that a focal geography is an area that the District has
identified as being in need of such a formalized planning process before meaningful implementation can take place.

Ms. Christopher stated that in drafting the framework for the Responsive Track, one must consider three main categories of means through which the District can enabled to truly remain responsive. These categories, she explained, are as follows:

- Formal planning – plan, policy, and ordinance changes
- Informal planning – ongoing coordination and communication with partners
- Programs – changes to procedure and practice

Ms. Christopher detailed the changes made to some of the District’s programs.

**Planning & Projects**

Ms. Christopher explained that the District’s CIP was being changed to not merely a prescriptive list of projects, but a goal-oriented framework that incorporates partner initiatives. She noted that such a CIP would allow the District to remain flexible, able to adapt to the ebb and flow of development.

Mr. Blackstad asked if District staff were developing “triggers;” or special conditions which, if met, would prompt capital investment or program action. He noted that the severe flooding of Meadowbrook Golf Course in 2014 “triggered” the ongoing floodplain modification project at the site. Ms. Christopher stated that the District’s E-Grade program would identify stressors, and an exacerbated stressor – such as severe flooding in a flood-prone area – would act as a trigger.

Mr. Blackstad asked how the District’s CIP would allow for investment in or involvement with partner-driven projects, such as the Southwest Light Rail Transit project. Ms. Christopher stated that the level of communication between the District and its partners would, in part, determine how (and how early) the District could become involved in partner projects.

Ms. Acomb asked how the District communicates with its city partners. Ms. Christopher stated that the District’s relationship with each city is different. She explained that the City of Edina, for instance, keeps the District well-updated on upcoming road projects. Mr. Stewart noted that the communication between the District and Edina often occurred between staff at each organization. He added that the City Council was typically not involved.

Ms. Christopher stated that District staff meet with city staff on an annual basis. She explained that while these meetings were useful, the District’s meeting was typically with only water resources staff at the cities. Ms. Christopher noted that in order to stay connected with land use planning, it may be wise for cities to invite their own land use planning staff to their meetings with the District.

Ms. Christopher continued presenting the changes made to the Planning & Projects program, describing the District’s partnership approach. She noted that establishing MOUs with partners has helped both the partners and the District to enjoy increased transparency and trust. Ms.
Christopher noted that the District seeks to exchange CIPs with its partners, allowing for more concrete examination of potential opportunities for aligning investments. She added that regular coordination and communication, as just discussed, would help the District to remain a nimble partner for cities and agencies.

Cost Share
Ms. Christopher explained that the grant approval process for the Cost Share program had changed. She noted that in addition to refining scoring criteria, staff established biannual deadlines for project applications and cross-departmental application review teams. The overall aim, Ms. Christopher stated, was to make the grant process more competitive and better prioritize projects.

Ms. McMillan asked for District staff to present an in-depth presentation of the Cost Share program and application process at the next PAC.

Permitting
Ms. Christopher noted that the Permitting program, originally tasked with issuing permits and monitoring field compliance, has recently undertaken an additional programmatic focus of developing partnerships with applicants. Where possible, she explained, program staff will identify projects with the opportunity for more beneficial natural resource outcomes than can be achieved through following permit requirements.

Ms. Christopher stated that the Permitting program provides the following value-added services for applicants who engage the District as a partner:

- Project-specific technical and planning assistance
- Streamlined regulation for applicants through District-held general permits with the Minnesota DNR and the USACE
- Flexibility – offering regional treatment instead of site-by-site treatment

Ms. Christopher mentioned that the District was exploring the possibility of establishing a wetland bank for mitigation credit as a service to applicants.

Education
Ms. Christopher listed the services of the District’s Education program available for cities.

- MS4 education requirements support
- Fee-for-service events, trainings, and materials
- Concerned citizen response
- Coordination with Lake Associations and Master Water Stewards

Ms. Musich asked if the District could provide guidance for various environmentally-focused citizen groups. Ms. Christopher stated that District staff were working with Jen Kader of the Fresh Water Society to explore coordination efforts between the District and groups like Master
Water Stewards. Ms. Yearwood noted that the DNR has materials available to help guide citizen group projects.

Ms. Christopher asked the Committee what the District could do to better coordinate with cities, and vice versa.

Ms. Acomb suggested that the District present annually to city Councils. Ms. Musich noted that policy makers are sometimes contacted directly by developers who looking to purchase land. If Councils are made aware of the Districts plans and services, she continued, Council members could coordinate with the District on potential projects.

Ms. Whalen asked if District staff could send out a questionnaire to city staff to gather the info needed. Ms. Christopher stated that the District does send out a questionnaire to city staff, and subsequently meets with the same staff members each year. She noted that ideally, the meetings would cover city and District plans further than one year out.

Mr. Wisker underscored that the goal of the meeting was to roughly outline the mechanics of coordination between the District and its partner organizations. He stated that the two main questions to answer in beginning to draft such an outline were:

1. What can the District do to be more aware of city plans?
2. How can cities change policy or practice to better direct info to the District?

Mr. Wisker stressed the importance of involving the District early on in city projects to maximize the value the District adds as a partner. Ms. McMillan spoke to the effectiveness of the District as a partner in maximizing the value for the City of Orono.

Mr. Wisker stated that the District hoped to document the formal and informal best practices for coordination. Mr. Erdahl noted that the list of best practices will be different from city to city.

Mr. Blackstad stated that, in addition to meetings and presentations with city staff and policy makers, District staff should consider coordinating with developers in a similar manner.

Updates

Ms. Christopher presented the District’s new Vision, Mission, Goals, and Guiding Principles to the Committee. She stated that the new guiding documents were meant to bring focus and clarity to the District’s approach of partnership and integration.

Ms. Christopher stated that the District was developing a brochure summarizing the approach of the District’s 2017 Comprehensive Plan. She noted that the deliverable would be sent out to District partners in April. Mr. Wisker stated that the brochure would illustrate the District’s approach with project examples and partner testimonials. He encouraged Committee members to offer their experience of working with the District for use in the brochure. Mr. Wisker noted that
partner testimonials were critical in supporting the new approach of the District’s 2017 Comprehensive Plan, which would ultimately be submitted to BWSR for approval.

Mr. Wisker stated that the American Planning Association (APA) recently published a water policy guide which called for, among other things, the integration of water planning with land use planning. He noted that the District’s shift in direction matches this call action.

Ms. Christopher stated that the District would be sending out an information request to cities on the following information:

- City CIPs, land use projections, and goals/priorities
- Progress towards 2007 load reduction goals
- Relevant ordinances

Ms. Christopher noted that at the next PAC, the Committee would be discussing the role of LGUs in protecting water resources through load reductions, best management practices, and ordinances.

The Committee agreed to meet on the 26th of April.

The Committee meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Cook
Planning Assistant