MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT

MINUTES OF THE
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

October 21, 2015

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Terry Jeffery, Jessica Van Der Werff, Lois Eberhart, Liz Stout, Bob Bean, Derek Asche, Erick Francis, Cara Geheren, Mike Kelly, Steve Christopher, Kate Drewry, Jennie Skancke, Karen Jensen, Rachael Crabb, Chris Zadak, Rich Brasch.

OTHERS PRESENT

Becky Christopher, Lead Planner and Project Manager; Anna Brown, Planner and Project Manager; James Wisker, Director of Planning and Projects; Matthew Cook, Planning Assistant.

COMMITTEE MEETING

Following introductions, Ms. Christopher reviewed the meeting agenda, which included an overview of the Plan development process, an introduction to the District’s internal strategic planning framework, an outline of the proposed Plan structure, and a few updates. She noted that the primary purpose of the meeting was to provide additional context for the committee before delving into different elements of implementation framework over next four meetings.

Plan Development Process

Ms. Christopher noted that, at the last meeting in August, she proposed a list of future agenda topics for the committee with their role focused primarily on helping the District improve its implementation model. She explained that one of the goals for the meeting was to show how these agenda topics and the committee’s role fit into the overall Plan development process.

Ms. Christopher walked the committee through a flow diagram outlining the Plan development process. Starting at the bottom, the diagram showed the foundational elements that feed into and inform the Plan:

- **2007 Comprehensive Plan** – provides strong foundation of data, issue identification, and water resource goals.
- **Progress since 2007** – lessons learned, new programs, projects implemented, progress toward 2007 nutrient goals – these will be compiled into a self-assessment report.
- **New policies and guiding principles** – Balanced Urban Ecology Policy, priority geography identification, TMDL Credit Sharing Policy, Ecosystem Evaluation Program (E-grade).
- **New data since 2007** – hydrodata and trend analyses, AIS data, stream assessment update, Six Mile Diagnostic and carp study, TMDLs, Minnehaha Creek Baseflow Study, Atlas 14.
Ms. Eberhart asked if the summary of lessons learned would either be incorporated as an element of the final comprehensive plan or be developed as a separate work product earlier on. Ms. Christopher responded that it is being prepared as a separate report and will be completed in the next few months.

Ms. Eberhart asked if the E-Grade program would include the monitoring and assessment of streams. Ms. Christopher responded that it will. Ms. Eberhart then asked if Wenck was the consultant helping to develop E-Grade, noting that the City of Minneapolis would be interested in a similar program for their own waterbodies. Ms. Christopher again responded affirmatively.

Ms. Christopher continued reviewing the diagram, moving up to the Plan development process which was divided into three primary buckets of work with the areas of committee/stakeholder involvement highlighted (orange = committees, blue = other stakeholder inputs):

- **Strategic planning framework** – This would be a largely internal process to refine the organization’s mission and goals and evaluate its programs (discussed more later in the meeting).
- **Data updates** – A District and consultant-led process to incorporate new studies and data that will feed into the subwatershed plans.
- **Implementation framework** – This area was highlighted as the primary focus of the Plan update and where the District will be seeking the most help from the advisory committees. Discussions will include refining implementation processes for focal and responsive geographies; developing the partnership framework by exploring streamlined regulation, the role of LGUs in supporting the Plan goals, and the integration of land-use and water planning; and defining the District’s role in specific management areas (e.g. AIS, chlorides, groundwater).

The diagram then showed these areas of plan development feeding into the three volumes of the Plan – Executive Summary, Data and Issue Identification, and Goals and Implementation Plan. Finally, it showed the formal plan review process, including a 60-day and 90-day review period. Ms. Christopher also referred the group to the corresponding Gantt chart and agenda list in their packet.

**Strategic Planning**

Ms. Christopher continued the presentation by providing an overview of the internal strategic planning process the District is undertaking. The first graphic illustrated how the District will conduct its planning and evaluation at different levels and time scales, including:

- Long-range mission and vision
- 10-year Comprehensive Plan
- 5-year self-assessment and strategic planning
- 2-year progress reporting
- Annual work plans
After providing a brief background on why the strategic planning framework was developed, Ms. Christopher explained that the purpose of the framework is to facilitate evaluation of existing programs and future initiatives to ensure that the District is allocating its resources to their highest and best use. It provides context for decision-making by linking program activities back to the District’s mission and goals; identifying the outcomes, metrics, and resource allocation for each activity; and showing how the District’s various programs align. She walked through a series of diagrams explaining how the District staff and Board will use the tool to evaluate each program as part of this plan update. She noted that the District intends to go through a similar process every five years to assess priorities and recalibrate program activities, as needed.

**Plan Structure**

Ms. Christopher provided a brief overview of the proposed plan structure and the content that would be included under each of the three volumes - Executive Summary, Data and Issue Identification, and Goals and Implementation Plan. She explained that the District’s intent is for the implementation section of this Plan to focus more on establishing processes for how the District will coordinate with communities to integrate efforts and remain responsive and less on laying out a prescriptive list of activities in each subwatershed, as with the previous plan.

Ms. Eberhart inquired as to how the District anticipated working with municipalities in relation to land use projections and suggested that the Committee be used as a venue for starting dialogues with the appropriate city staff. Ms. Christopher agreed that it should be coordinated with the Committee members.

Mr. Brasch asked if the District’s goal for the plan structure was to find a way to avoid having to undertake a plan amendment process for every project not specifically forecasted in the plan. Ms. Christopher confirmed, stating that the goal is to create a framework that allows the District the flexibility to respond to opportunities as they arise. The idea is that the plan would outline the known issues, strategies, and priorities for each subwatershed and set a funding cap. The District could then have the flexibility to act on opportunities that align with the plan priorities and fit within the funding cap without the need for a plan amendment. She cited the District’s past amendment to the Minnehaha Creek Subwatershed Plan as an example of how this structure has been used and worked successfully for the District already.

Ms. Eberhart asked if some projects would still require a plan amendment if they were considered significantly different from the strategies that were outlined in the plan. Ms. Christopher confirmed, stating that occasional plan amendments may still be needed but the goal is to minimize the need.

**Updates**

Ms. Christopher provided a brief overview of the information that was submitted in response to the District’s information request. She noted that a summary was also provided in their packet, and the full submittals are available on the District website. She stated that the District will
continue to refer back to the submittals as the Plan is developed to ensure that the priorities provided by the cities and agencies are being considered and addressed.

Anna Brown provided an update to the committee on the development of the Six Mile implementation plan. The Six Mile planning process will mirror the process for the Comprehensive Plan, convening both a technical and policy advisory committee and serving as a subchapter of that plan. The objective of the Six Mile process will be to improve how the District coordinates with its partner agencies in that geography by identifying their goals and missions, regulations and authorities, and plans for development and growth. The output should not only reflect the District’s goals, but also the existing plans of its partners and a framework for how these will work together. The lessons learned from this process will serve as the implementation model for focal geographies in the comprehensive plan.

Ms. Jensen asked for clarification on what exactly a “focal geography” meant. Ms. Christopher explained that, under the District’s two-track approach, the District will identify 1-2 high-need areas (focal geographies) where the District will lead a process to convene stakeholders and develop a coordinated implementation plan to make significant improvements to the system. The Six Mile planning process is the first such effort.

Mr. Bean asked if the E-grade program will help identify focal geographies and if it will account for development pressure. Ms. Christopher responded that the E-grade program will be used to identify the needs of each subwatershed and help the District determine where the “focal geography” approach is needed.

Mr. Wisker noted that the E-grade program provides an assessment of current conditions so it would not capture future development projections, though this is a factor the District will consider in selecting focal geographies. He added that not every subwatershed will need the focal geography approach. In some cases, the District’s responsive tools and programs can be used to address the needs of the area. The goal will be to help cities understand how they can leverage the assets of the District to address their unique needs and priorities.

Ms. Van Der Wurff asked how the extent of a focal geography’s boundaries would be established. Ms. Christopher responded that this would be dependent on the needs of a particular area and would not necessarily include an entire subwatershed.

Ms. Eberhart asked if there was a set number of focal geographies to be identified in the next comprehensive plan. Ms. Christopher responded that the plan will likely establish a process for identifying and planning in focal geographies but not a prescriptive list of where and when the District would use this approach. Mr. Wisker added that this is because the need for and timing of the approach will often be externally driven based on what is happening on the landscape.

Mr. Brasch asked if the District’s new approach would affect how it does permitting. Mr. Wisker responded that it would and explained that the District is currently in the process of mapping out the various layers of regulation to identify areas of overlap and conflict in an effort to streamline
the regulatory framework. He noted that, through the Six Mile planning process, the District will be working with the communities to map out areas of likely impact (through development, infrastructure projects, etc.) and coordinating early to identify opportunities for mitigation.

Ms. Drewry asked for clarification on who would be invited to the Six Mile advisory committee, stating that her colleague, Ms. Skancke, should be included. Ms. Brown responded that she would add Ms. Skancke to the list.

Ms. Christopher informed the group that they would be receiving an online survey to help inform the District’s self-assessment and strategic planning process.

Ms. Christopher asked if there were any volunteers to serve as the liaison for the next Policy Advisory Committee meeting on December 15th at 10:00 AM. After a brief discussion of whether it should be a consultant or city staff person, it was generally agreed that Ms. Eberhart would attend.

The Committee generally agreed that December 16th, at 2:00 PM was the best time for its next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Christopher
MCWD Lead Planner and Project Manager