



Title: Authorization to execute contract for Six Mile Marsh Prairie trail and interpretation design

Resolution number: 21-034

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Reviewed by: Name/Title: Michael Hayman, Project Planning Manager

Recommended action: Board authorization to execute a contract for design, landscape architecture, engineering, site interpretation and communications services for the Six Mile Marsh Prairie trail and site interpretation elements.

Schedule: May - August 2021 – Project design.
August 12, 2021 – Approval of 90% design plans.
August 30, 2021 – Release of construction contract bid.
October 2021 – May 2022 – Project construction.
Spring 2022 – Interpretive element installation.

Budget considerations: Fund name and code: Six Mile Marsh Prairie 3-3106
Fund budget: \$347,861 (Phase 2)
Expenditures to date: \$274 (Phase 2)
Requested amount of funding: \$62,366 (Phase 2)

Past Board action: Res # 08-092 Halstead Bay Wetland Restoration Project, Project Ordering
Res # 11-052A Authorization to purchase Halverson property in the Six Mile Marsh Subwatershed
Res #12-077 Authorization to execute a contract for design and construction oversight for the Halverson-Dimler Restoration
Res # 13-027 Six Mile Marsh Prairie Restoration Project – Award of Construction Contract
Res # 20-101 Amendment to the 2021 Budget
Res # 21-021 Authorization to release the request for proposals for Six Mile Marsh Prairie trail and interpretation design

Summary:

Beginning in 2008, the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) began to identify opportunities for wetland restorations that would reduce external phosphorus loading to Six Mile Creek and downstream Halstead Bay. These efforts led to the 2011-2012 purchases of three adjacent parcels that total 210 acres and are positioned on the north edge of Six Mile Marsh. In 2013, the MCWD undertook restoration of these former agricultural properties, collectively known as the Six Mile Marsh Prairie Restoration. The restoration of the site as a whole has been aimed at both reducing nutrient loading and improvement of upland prairie, wetland, and woodland habitat within the site. Today, less than 2% of Minnesota's prairie habitat remains from the 18 million acres that once stretched across the state from southeast to northwest. This habitat type continues to decline, and the Six Mile Marsh Prairie preserves this increasingly rare ecosystem.

Included in original design plans for the restoration of the site was a proposed future trail alignment that would serve as a spur trail from the Dakota Rail Regional Trail which lies on the property's western boundary. However, construction of the spur trail was deferred to allow the restoration time to establish prior to providing public access on the site.

Over the past eight years, the 210-acre property has been actively managed to support and enhance the restoration and now features 110 acres of native prairie, 10 acres of high-quality wetlands, and 10 acres of restored oak savanna. The remaining 80 acres is part of the Six Mile Marsh wetland complex. Since 2016, a trail has been mowed in the general alignment of the proposed trail which connects to the regional trail. This temporary trail has offered MCWD staff the opportunity to observe the level of use from the regional trail and to contemplate the best possible permanent trail alignment considering a number of site factors including potential trail uses, interpretive themes, site topography, and long-term site operations and management.

The 2021 Capital Improvement Plan included \$172,851 carried forward from the original capital project budget to design and construct a public access trail into the Six Mile Marsh Prairie from the Dakota Rail Regional Trail. Given recent experience with trail design and site interpretation at Wassermann Lake Preserve and the greater investment into the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay (SMCHB) subwatershed as a focal geography, the Board of Managers approved a budget amendment on December 17, 2020 that increased the project budget to \$347,861 to support the development of a more comprehensive site access and interpretation plan. District staff will seek a thoughtful approach to design of the best possible trail alignment and development of interactive interpretive elements that will complement that design.

In pursuit of creating this valuable user experience that is sensitive to the site, staff solicited design services, including landscape architecture, engineering, and interpretive element design, through a competitive request for proposals (RFP) process. The RFP was released on March 12, 2021, and an optional informational meeting was held on-site on March 18, 2021. Proposals were to be submitted by April 12, 2021, and in total, eight proposals were received. A team of seven staff reviewed and scored each proposal using an evaluation matrix that numerically ranked proposals on criteria including project understanding, innovation and creativity, experience, and cost. Based on the quality of the written proposals and similar project experience, three design teams were chosen to be interviewed for selection to lead design: Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects, Damon Farber Landscape Architects, and SRF Consulting Group.

The interview format provided design teams an opportunity to present their proposals, describe the roles of each member, and answer questions about the design process. Based on the quality of the proposal and interview, both evaluated under a careful and objective deliberation by staff, it is recommended that Damon Farber Landscape Architects be selected as the design consultant and awarded the contract for services detailed in the Damon Farber Cost Proposal, which is provided under separate cover to the Board of Managers.

Damon Farber's proposal indicated a keen sense of the natural character of the site and how its unique features would guide trail design and interpretation. The proposal equally considered how to implement the project with a "light touch" on sensitive resources, how to weigh several factors that will influence trail alignment and construction, and how to creatively develop engaging site interpretation within budget. During the interview, the Damon Farber team exhibited a clear enthusiasm for the project, and also expressed a deep appreciation for the site that staff believes will translate into an excellent design.

During the interview process, design teams were informed that the District will be without communications staff into the summer months and were asked to describe their experience and capabilities in assisting the District with communications efforts throughout the course of design. Following the interviews and at the request of staff, Damon Farber has amended the original cost proposal to include communications support during design and construction phases. The total cost of the proposal is within the anticipated budget allocation for design, communications, and construction oversight.

In accordance with Minnesota Statutes §13.591, subdivision 3(b), the submitted proposals will not be part of the public record until the contract has been executed. A copy of all submitted proposals, along with Damon Farber's detailed fee proposal, will be distributed to the Board of Managers for review via email prior to the May 13, 2021 meeting.



RESOLUTION

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- WHEREAS in August 2011 and August 2012, the Board of Managers authorized the purchase of three contiguous parcels north of the Six Mile Marsh totaling 210 acres for the purpose of implementing restoration of wetland basins and adjacent upland within the site to advance nutrient reduction goals in the subwatershed and particularly to lower phosphorus export to Halstead Bay which requires the largest phosphorus load reduction within the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD);
- WHEREAS in January 2013, the Board of Managers approved the final design of the Six Mile Marsh Prairie Restoration project which implemented 110 acres of wetland and adjacent upland restoration and developed concept plans for future construction of a spur trail to create public access to the property once the restoration was established;
- WHEREAS pursuant to Resolution 14-047, the Board of Managers identified the Six Mile Creek-Halstead Bay (SMCHB) subwatershed as a priority area for focusing planning activities and coordination efforts with subwatershed partners. The Six Mile Marsh Prairie Restoration project has been advanced with support from the City of Minnetrista, Three Rivers Park District, Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service;
- WHEREAS in January 2018, the Board of Managers adopted the MCWD Watershed Management Plan (WMP), which incorporated a comprehensive restoration strategy for the SMCHB subwatershed to achieve MCWD's goals of protecting and improving water quality, water quantity, ecological integrity, and thriving communities through land use and water integration. The WMP includes MCWD program activities which include engaging and educating communities on water resource issues and building support for MCWD projects;
- WHEREAS in December 2020, the Board of Managers amended the 2021 budget to increase the budget for the Six Mile Marsh Prairie Restoration project to \$347,861 for design and construction of a trail connecting the Dakota Rail Regional Trail to the Six Mile Marsh Prairie site and interpretive elements for the project;
- WHEREAS, in March 2021, the Board of Managers authorized the release of the request for proposals for design services for the Six Mile Marsh Prairie trail and interpretation;
- WHEREAS, in March 2021, MCWD staff solicited proposals from a pool of consultants for said services and received eight responsive proposals;
- WHEREAS, MCWD may exercise its judgment in making decisions to retain professional services, and in this instance, used a panel of MCWD staff to evaluate written proposals through a competitive process which included careful, objective deliberation by MCWD staff to select finalists to advance into the interview process;
- WHEREAS, the MCWD staff evaluation panel formed a recommendation for design consultant selection based on criteria including project understanding, innovation, creativity, experience, and cost;

WHEREAS, the MCWD staff evaluation panel unanimously recommends the selection of Damon Farber Landscape Architects, and the Board of Managers finds that the evaluation was thorough and concurs in the recommendation reached;

WHEREAS, due to MCWD staff changes, it is prudent to contract for a scope of services that includes an additional task not solicited in the RFP to provide communications support during the design and construction phases of the project.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Board of Managers authorizes the District Administrator, on advice of Counsel, to enter into a contract with Damon Farber Landscape Architects for design, engineering, and communications services for the design of the Six Mile Marsh Prairie Trail and Interpretation, in an amount not to exceed the amount set forth in the proposal, and authorizes the Administrator to execute change orders in his discretion up to an additional 10 percent of the contract amount.

Resolution Number 21-034 was moved by Manager _____, seconded by Manager _____. Motion to adopt the resolution ___ ayes, ___ nays, ___ abstentions. Date: 5/13/2021

Secretary Date: _____

DRAFT