



MEMORANDUM

To: MCWD Board of Managers
From: Anna Brown, Planner Project Manager
Date: July 11, 2016
Re: 4.1 Board Tour Report

Purpose:

Provide a summary of the May 21, 2016 Six Mile-Halsted Bay Subwatershed MCWD Board of Managers tour.

Background:

On May 21, 2016, District staff led the MCWD Board of Managers on a tour of the Six Mile-Halsted Bay subwatershed (Six Mile), the District’s priority focal geography. The Board’s adoption of Six Mile as a focal geography in 2014 memorialized its commitment to working in Six Mile over a sustained time period to protect and improve the abundant natural resources in the geography. The Board has further memorialized, through resolution, that success within this geography is dependent upon forming relationships with local partners and integrating the District’s capital investments with local planning priorities. District planning staff have convened local stakeholders to identify areas for collaboration and to develop a cohesive watershed vision to guide implementation and investment in the area.

The tour provided an opportunity for Board members to see up close some of the challenges and opportunities presented by this geography and retain a visual understanding of the area for future discussions. Staff planned a tour of the Pierson-Marsh-Wasserman sub-drainage area, which represents the range of landscapes and how each will influence the phasing and approach to District investment in the area. This sub-drainage area also features both the headwaters of Six Mile Creek and downtown Victoria, the largest and fastest developing City in the Subwatershed.

The tour moved from undeveloped, future annexation land, through land actively being converted from agriculture to residential, and finally to the fully developed downtown area. The Board and Staff also spent some time in Carver Park Reserve, a 3,700 acre park within the subwatershed. Moving through the landscape in this way highlighted the contrast between planning for long-term capital improvements in the transition areas and responding to the rapid land conversion at the urban fringe, and the need to plan for both in order to achieve meaningful protection and improvement in the watershed.

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In the transition areas – those areas slated for long-term development, but outside of the immediate planning horizon – the District’s approach is to identify project areas, identify potential partners, and work to develop a concept plan that incorporates both water quality improvements and long-term partner objectives, including future developments, transportation infrastructure, and recreation enhancements. The District is also working to develop an investment framework to proactively identify implementation resources. In some cases implementation of these opportunities will be in the short-term, but in many cases it will likely be beyond the 5 year horizon that will be captured by the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

The tour emphasized the significant amount of land use conversion underway in the Six Mile geography. Staff and Managers saw several examples of land on the cusp of development or recently converted. In these areas, District staff will similarly work to identify areas for collaboration through goal identification and concept plan development, but in some cases there may be little opportunity, beyond regulation, to influence outcomes and leverage investment towards improvement given that land use change is underway. There is also a significant amount of land for sale to be developed, including on parcels that could have direct influence on priority water quality improvements.

Seeing these active conversion areas reemphasized that, while we develop the plan, the District needs to be responsive in implementing projects or acquisition as land use is changing in real time. In order to be responsive, the Board Managers discussed the need for a prioritization mechanism, particularly for land actively for sale or that will be put on the market in the near future. In Six Mile, we saw land that could lead to a direct water quality improvement, land that could be acquired for conservation purposes, and land that would be opportunistic but not fulfilling a direct improvement. The District is working to develop an approach to systematically evaluate new project and acquisition opportunities, and a draft will be presented at the July 14 Planning and Policy Committee Meeting.

Staff is currently working on developing a capital debt program with Carver County to support both the areas of active land use change and the long term planning in the transition areas. Such a program will stabilize the District’s budget over the Six Mile planning horizon, as well as ensure that MCWD can commit to the scope of work anticipated in Six Mile while maintaining involvement in other areas of the District. The capital debt program will become part of a broader investment strategy in the geography that will enable Staff to be responsive to opportunities in real time.

Another opportunity identified through discussion during the tour is increasing coordination between District staff and the development community. Staff noted that there are a handful of identifiable developers responsible for a majority of the active development underway in Six Mile. Convening these actors to identify areas of mutual interest and, where applicable, develop Memoranda of understanding would improve District impact where land use conversion is imminent.

Staff continue to work to develop a strategic implementation and investment strategy for the Six Mile geography. The May 21 Board tour highlighted some of the main assets we are seeking to protect in the region, as well as some of the challenges we will face in implementing them. The outcome is a working understanding that we will all hold in common as we advance our planning in the geography.

If there are questions in advance of the meeting, please contact: Anna Brown (952) 641-4522.

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