

1                                   **MINUTES OF THE PLANNING AND POLICY COMMITTEE**  
2                                   **OF THE MINNEHAHA CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT**  
3                                   **BOARD OF MANAGERS**

4  
5                                   March 19, 2015  
6

7                                   **CALL TO ORDER**  
8

9                                   The Planning and Policy Committee meeting of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District  
10                                  Board of Managers was called to order by Committee Chair Jim Calkins at 6:45 p.m. in  
11                                  the District offices, 15320 Minnetonka Boulevard, Minnetonka, Minnesota 55345.  
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13                                  **COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT**  
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15                                  Jim Calkins, Committee Chair, Brian Shekleton, Richard Miller  
16

17                                  **NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT**  
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19                                  Sherry White  
20

21                                  **OTHERS PRESENT**  
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23                                  Lars Erdahl, District Administrator; James Wisker, District Planning and Projects  
24                                  Director; Tiffany Schaufler, District Project and Land Program Manager; Becky  
25                                  Christopher, District Planner-Project Manager; Michael Hayman, District Planner-Project  
26                                  Manager; Laura Domyancich, District Project and Land Technician; and Chris Meehan,  
27                                  District Engineer.  
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30                                  **MATTERS FROM THE FLOOR**  
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32                                  *None*  
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34                                  **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**  
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36                                  *No changes to the agenda were made and it was approved by consensus.*  
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38                                  **COMMITTEE AGENDA**  
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40                                  Land Conservation and the Next Generation Comprehensive Plan  
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42                                  James Wisker introduced the discussion agenda with a historical overview of the Land  
43                                  Conservation Program. He explained that staff is seeking Committee discussion on the  
44                                  future of the program, and specific areas that may warrant discussion during the  
45                                  development of the next generation Comprehensive Plan.  
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47 Mr. Wisker reviewed the purpose of the Land Conservation Program as described in the  
48 2007 Comprehensive Plan; to conserve, maintain and enhance green infrastructure and  
49 natural resources for stormwater runoff management, habitat and other watershed  
50 benefits.

51  
52 He highlighted that the 2007 Plan contemplated a suite of strategies mirroring the two-  
53 track approach proposed for the next generation Comprehensive Plan. He reviewed the  
54 strategies identified in the 2007 Plan:

- 55
- 56 • Providing technical assistance to municipalities, landowners, and others on land  
57 conservation and restoration options (financing, wetland banking, restoration,  
58 laws and policies, etc.);
  - 59
  - 60 • Conservation development planning and promotion of model ordinances;
  - 61
  - 62 • Facilitating partnerships to leverage multi-jurisdictional funding, cost-share and  
63 tax incentive opportunities;
  - 64
  - 65 • Acquisition of easements; and
  - 66
  - 67 • Fee acquisition for high priority lands.
  - 68

69 He noted that these land conservation strategies could be divided into two categories,  
70 consistent with the next generation Comprehensive Plan:

71  
72 Track 1 – Focus:  
73 Fee acquisitions integrated into strategic capital project planning efforts and other  
74 public and private goals.

75  
76 Track 2 – Responsiveness:  
77 Technical assistance, easement acquisition, conservation development planning,  
78 model ordinances, etc, to remain responsive to emerging opportunities.

79  
80 The Committee discussed the respective roles for the two tracks. It was observed that,  
81 due to depressed market values and a high volume of opportunities, the District had relied  
82 heavily on fee acquisition since 2007, and that Track 2 had not realized its full potential.

83  
84 The Committee reviewed the utility of the District’s key conservation areas in guiding fee  
85 acquisitions. It was noted that key conservation areas were policy level inventory tools  
86 that did not necessarily provide real-time guidance for specific acquisition priorities  
87 emerging across the District’s landscape.

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90 The Committee also considered limitations of the scoring criteria historically utilized to  
91 rank acquisitions. The Committee agreed that while the natural resource foundation of  
92 key conservation areas remained valid, a larger suite of variables should be considered in  
93 the future through an integrated planning framework consistent with the “balanced urban  
94 ecology” policy.

95  
96 The Committee discussed the value of developing directional guiding principles to  
97 inform the future use of fee acquisitions, while preserving flexibility. The Committee  
98 discussed the need for fee acquisitions to consider variables including development  
99 pressure, surrounding public-private planning initiatives, context to specific water  
100 resource issues and needs, flooding potential, urgency, and the limitations of other land  
101 conservation tools.

102  
103 Continuing its discussion of fee acquisitions the Committee reaffirmed the intent for  
104 some fee acquisitions to serve as a pathway to implementing conservation easements,  
105 with excess land being positioned for sale. The Committee reviewed the parcels on  
106 which this had occurred and those on which it had not. It was agreed that where possible  
107 fee acquisitions should be planned and coordinated with local land-use authorities and  
108 other public and private sector partners.

109  
110 Concluding discussion on the future use of fee acquisition as it related to the  
111 Comprehensive Plan, Mr. Wisker reviewed non-fee based emerging opportunities to  
112 implement land conservation. He summarized recent District partnerships to facilitate  
113 wetland banking, conservation development, restoration design, and easement  
114 acquisitions. It was agreed that in the absence of a formal Land Conservation  
115 Department, non-traditional pathways like Permitting offer innovative pipelines for  
116 implementing land conservation practices. Recent initiatives were discussed, outlining  
117 the following responsive strategies:

- 118  
119
- 120 • Proactive involvement in development planning before concept plans and  
121 preliminary plat provide multi-sector value and better conservation outcomes  
122 than through regulation alone;
  - 123 • Alignment and integration of land-use and water policies reveal hidden  
124 economies and incentivize creative land conservation opportunities;
  - 125 • Technical assistance in areas of land conservation techniques, financial strategies  
126 and available programs promote land conservation without MCWD investment;
  - 127 • The ability of MCWD initiatives and other planned public-private investments to  
128 leverage conservation easements.

129 Following discussion the Committee agreed that, in addition to developing guiding  
130 principles for fee acquisitions, policy discussion and Land Conservation Program  
131 development during the Comprehensive Plan process should focus on responsive land  
132 conservation strategies (Track 2).

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137 The Committee reviewed the District's existing land holdings. Mr. Wisker reviewed the  
138 existing properties held in fee. He noted that fee holdings were generally aggregated in  
139 contiguous blocks within the priority geographies of Minnehaha Creek, Six Mile Creek,  
140 and Painter Creek. He highlighted that the groupings of properties within these  
141 subwatersheds were located on distinct landscape features within the watershed, all  
142 draining to regionally significant impaired waterbodies.

143

144 • Minnehaha Creek – Meadowbrook Lake, draining to Lake Hiawatha

145 • Six Mile Creek – Six Mile Marsh, draining to Halsted Bay

146 • Painter Creek – Painter Marsh, draining to Jennings Bay

147

148 The Board discussed the historic evaluation of these properties for development potential.  
149 Mr. Wisker identified that these three aggregations of properties were located at a nexus  
150 of regional trails and activity generators:

151

152 • Minnehaha Creek

153 ○ Cedar Regional Trail(s), LRT, Hospital, Urban Development, Schools,  
154 Meadowbrook Golf Course, Parks.

155 • Six Mile Creek

156 ○ Dakota Regional Trail, Minnetonka Regional Trail, Gail Woods Farm,  
157 Woodland Cove.

158 • Painter Creek

159 ○ Luce Line Trail, Minnetonka Orchard

160

161 Mr. Wisker noted that some level of public access had been planned by the Board at  
162 Minnehaha Creek and Six Mile Creek and requested Committee discussion regarding the  
163 possibility of these fee holdings to serve as geographically distributed, publicly accessible  
164 examples of the District's work and the relationship between land and water.

165

166 The Committee expressed a range of opinions regarding establishing all three areas as  
167 publicly accessible education sites, and public access in general. The Committee  
168 discussed that some sites warranted planned public access (Reach 20), while some lands  
169 should retain preservation status.

170

171 Manager Calkins expressed his opinion that all publicly held land should be accessible at  
172 some level, even if not formally planned and facilitated by the District. Manager  
173 Shekleton outlined the model employed by the Hennepin County Regional Rail  
174 Authority. He noted that HCRRA did not facilitate public access by building facilities,  
175 but rather partnered with other public and private entities wishing to use the land.

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177 Following further discussion the Committee agreed that public access would be decided  
178 on a case by case basis determined by opportunity, as in the cases of the Minnehaha  
179 Creek Greenway and Six Mile Creek properties.  
180 Program staff indicated that this guidance would be used to develop a framework for the  
181 spectrum of possible levels of public access, and to finalize a grouping of management  
182 plans which may be ready for review at the next Committee Meeting.

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184

185 Stonegate Farm

186

187 The Committee reviewed the concept plans for Stonegate Farm and discussed the  
188 acreage, configuration and value of proposed conservation areas in relation to natural  
189 resource and corridor opportunities off-site.

190

191 Laura Domyancich reviewed the conservation subdivision requirement for the developer  
192 to identify a land steward and land stewardship plan. She noted that the framework  
193 provided Homeowners Association funding for management of conservation areas, with a  
194 selected land steward being responsible for monitoring, inspection and compliance.

195

196 ***The Committee recommended to the Board of Managers that staff indicate District***  
197 ***support for, and negotiate, the role of land steward within the Stonegate Farm***  
198 ***conservation subdivision.***

199

200 South Katrina Marsh

201

202 Tiffany Schaufler identified an opportunity to leverage a conservation easement over a  
203 portion or all of South Katrina Marsh, in exchange for the District providing technical  
204 and project assistance to address drainage and high water issues in the area. Following  
205 discussion the Committee expressed support for the concept.

206

207 Diercks Property

208

209 Tiffany Schaufler reviewed a request from an adjoining property owner to locate a cul-  
210 de-sac on the Diercks' property, to facilitate an adjacent development proposal. The  
211 Committee reviewed the original intent of the acquisition, the natural resource impacts of  
212 the proposal, and the relation to potential future development opportunities on the  
213 Diercks' property.

214

215 ***The Committee recommended to the Board of Managers that staff work with the City***  
216 ***of Minnetrista and the adjacent developer to locate the proposed cul-de-sac on the***  
217 ***adjoining property, rather than on District owned property at 1765 County Road 110***  
218 ***N; and that staff continue to investigate opportunities for programming and***  
219 ***development with public and private partners, including the City of Minnetrista.***

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224 Minnehaha Creek Greenway

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226 James Wisker and Michael Hayman provided an update on Blake Road area planning  
227 initiatives as they related to the District's planning for 325 Blake Road. The Committee  
228 discussed the importance of continuing to work closely with the City of Hopkins and  
229 Hennepin County to coordinate its work with the work of others in the area.

230

231 Mr. Wisker provided an update on partnership discussions with Japs Olson. He noted  
232 that a land swap was being proposed to address municipal boundary issues associated  
233 with the Japs Olson expansion plans. He reviewed the framework for partnership  
234 memorialized in a letter of understanding between Japs Olson and MCWD, noting that  
235 staff continued to work with Japs Olson and the City of St. Louis Park on a  
236 comprehensive stormwater management plan that may result in the addition of existing  
237 urban land to the Minnehaha Creek Greenway.

238

239 **ADJOURNMENT**

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241 There being no further business, the Planning and Policy Committee meeting of the  
242 Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Board of Managers adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

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244 Respectfully submitted,

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247

248

249 James Wisker

250 Director of Planning and Projects

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