



Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting

January 13, 2021 - 3:30 p.m.

Zoom Videoconference

WPC Members in Attendance

Josh Borton Chuck Clanton
Tony Wotzka Mark Henry
Ken Betzold Steve Hamrick

Staff in Attendance

Mark Zabel, VRWJPO
Mark Ryan, VRWJPO
Paula Liepold, VRWJPO
Travis Thiel, VRWJPO

Others in Attendance

Curt Coudron, Dakota County SWCD
Laurie Halverson, Commissioner,
Dakota County

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Henry at 3:35 p.m. Roll call was taken.

2. Election of Officers

Mark Zabel opened nominations for Chair. Motion by Commissioner Clanton for Commissioner Henry as Chair. Commissioner Henry accepted the nomination. Zabel called for any further nominations and made a third call for nominations. There were no further nominations. Zabel then called for any objection to election of Commissioner Henry to the position of Chair by acclamation. There were no objections. Zabel declared Commissioner Henry elected to Chair by acclamation and turned control of the meeting over to Mr. Henry.

Commissioner Henry called for nominations for Vice-chair. No members offered a nomination. Commissioner Henry asked again for a member to make a nomination and provided some time for response. When there was no response, Commissioner Henry then made a nomination of Commissioner Betzold as Vice-chair. Commissioner Henry then called for further nominations and repeated the call for nominations a third time. There were no further nominations. Commissioner Henry then suggested the election of Commissioner Betzold to Vice-chair via White Ballot. Commissioner Henry asked if there was any objection to this action and there was none. Commissioner Henry then declared Commissioner Betzold elected to Vice-chair. Commissioner Henry noted that Commissioner Betzold has served as Township Chairman in the past and served well in that capacity.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

None

4. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Henry asked for a motion to approve the agenda as provided in the packet.

Motion by Commissioner Borton, second by Commissioner Betzold, to approve the agenda. The agenda was unanimously approved by 6-0 roll call.

5. Approval of Minutes

Zabel indicated to the members that Commissioner Clanton had contacted him earlier in the day to inform him that information pertinent to the meeting was missing from the draft minutes. Upon review of the draft minutes provided in the meeting packet, Zabel discovered that indeed pages were missing; the first half of the meeting was noted but the second half was not. This may have occurred in compiling the materials into the packet for posting. Zabel then corrected the minutes by including the missing materials in a revised set of draft minutes that was distributed to members via email in anticipation of the requirement for corrections at this meeting. Zabel suggested members refer to this revised version and provide any additional corrections which would be incorporated upon their approval. There were no further corrections or other changes suggested.

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Borton, to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2020, meeting, as revised. The minutes were unanimously approved by 6-0 roll call vote.

6. Business Items

6a. Recommendation to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District for Services in 2021

Zabel outlined that this item is for an agreement with the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) that is pursued annually to allow cooperation and collaboration between the VRWJPO and the Dakota County SWCD to implement water quality improvement projects within the watershed. This year there are no significant changes to the work plan or budget as compared to last year. Zabel then requested Curt Coudron from the SWCD provide any further comments or detail pertinent to the requested recommendation.

Coudron commented that the Dakota SWCD is highly appreciative of the partnership and the opportunities for collaboration that are provided through this agreement. The agreement allows both organizations the opportunity to share strengths in implementing our missions and getting projects in the ground. Coudron then detailed the individual elements of the work plan.

When Coudron was highlighting the importance of work on feasibility and preliminary design, Chair Henry asked if people are generally cooperative with the work proposed by the staff of the SWCD when they are either approached by the SWCD for a conservation project or they reach out to the SWCD for a potential project on their property. Coudron responded that both approaches occur, the SWCD staff are approached by interested landowners and staff also approach landowners to try to encourage implementation of targeted practices. Coudron commented that it is usually easier when the landowner is the initiator, but that cooperation occurs with both.

Chair Henry also commented that he believes SWCD and others have been successful in getting more habitat on the ground in Dakota County than there has been in the past and asked if SWCD staff are seeing that as well. Coudron commented that he agrees that there is probably more habitat in the

landscape, in his opinion, than in the past but it is structured differently. Habitat is now more consolidated into big chunks where in the past it was more distributed in woodlots, fence lines, and the like. Chair Henry agreed with those statements.

Commissioner Clanton asked about the amount of CIP funding allocated (\$61,000) and how many projects is that distributed to. Coudron indicated that 14 projects were completed using those funds last year. Clanton also asked how much the use of those funds leverage other funding. Coudron responded that funds are usually leveraged at an equal level. Cover crops leverage Clean Water Funds through the Board of Water and Soil Resources. Project dollars are leveraged from landowners or other partners and the VRWJPO funds provide incentive that allows projects to be implemented that otherwise might not occur. Coudron noted that these dollars also attract technical assistance opportunities available through Clean Water Fund or other partners such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Motion by Commissioner Wotzka, second by Commissioner Betzold, to recommend execution of a joint powers agreement with the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District. The motion passed on an 6-0 roll-call vote.

6b. Recommendation to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with Scott Soil and Water Conservation District for Services in 2021

There was no representative from Scott SWCD at the meeting so Mark Zabel provided representation for the item. Zabel indicated that there were no differences between the work plan and budget presented compared to the work plan and budget in last year's agreement. However, members should be aware that there is a request to amend the Watershed Plan to include a project for an outlet repair on a wetland basin called the Bemis Wetland to be added to the implementation section. The public hearing related to this plan change was an item on the November 2020 meeting agenda. If that project is constructed it may impact the budget and the Scott SWCD may request an amendment the agreement in the future. This was not included at this time due to the uncertainty associated with the timing and the potential for funding from grants or other partner participation.

Chair Henry commented that he was curious as to the proportionality between the Dakota and Scott SWCD budgets in these agreements in comparison to the land areas serviced. Zabel commented that Scott SWCD generally overbudgets the CIP category for them to assure that they have funds to cover any project contracts that may come forward during the term of the agreement and rarely make use of all of those funds. Therefore, the VRWJPO has not had issue with needs identified through their work plan. If this did become an issue, we might need to do more work in cooperation with the Scott SWCD in project targeting and prioritization. Zabel noted that the Scott SWCD is currently slated to receive grant funding through the Watershed Based Implementation Fund program through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources to complete a subwatershed assessment in this area which will serve to identify and prioritize potential projects going forward. Chair Henry indicated he was satisfied with that answer.

Motion by Commissioner Borton, second by Commissioner Clanton, to recommend execution of a joint powers agreement with the Scott Soil and Water Conservation District. The motion passed on an 6-0 roll-call vote.

6c. Review Applications for Vacant Seats on the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission

Chair Henry asked how many seats are currently open to be filled by appointment. Zabel indicated that there are two seats open, Commissioner Rydeen has chosen not to seek appointment to another term

and Commissioner Rohrenbach resigned his seat. There are two open seats and three applicants. Zabel briefly reviewed the three applications. Zabel indicated that the only eligibility criteria for applicants is that they reside within the watershed. Beyond that it is up to the WPC to make recommendations, or if they choose not to make a recommendation, the decision would go to a review group made up of the Chair of the WPC, Chair of the JPB, and the Watershed Administrator to make selection(s) among eligible applicants for recommendation to the Board. Commissioner Borton suggested that upon review of the applications, Riesgraf and Kotz applications stood out as highly qualified and would be assets to the WPC. Commissioners Wotzka, Clanton, and Henry concurred stating that those two applications were prominent in their clear interest in water resources. Commissioner Clanton noted also that the completeness with which these two applicants filled out the application demonstrated their high level of interest.

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Borton, to recommend appointments of Andrew Riesgraf and James Kotz to the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission by the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board. The motion passed on an 6-0 roll-call vote.

7. Updates

7a. Chairperson's Report

Chair Henry commented that he is a hunter and has spent time the "Big Slough" fishing the creeks growing up and generally out in the landscapes of Dakota County. He has seen a lot of conservation projects that have been implemented and believes there is probably more habitat in the landscape than in the past (as discussed earlier). He has recently read articles regarding neonicotinoids and their potential impacts. Commissioner Henry asked if members think we are starting to have an emerging issue with chemicals (pesticides) in the landscape having impacts to wildlife. Do we need to start looking at things other than habitat? Commissioner Henry asked Zabel. Zabel provided some general overview of neonicotinoids and their use and effects as an insecticide. Commissioner Henry went on to describe his observations of the decline of pheasants in the landscape and questions whether this is an effect. Clanton suggested that there are larger issues at play such as the dependence on monoculture cropping and that diversity in cropping would be a help regarding these issues. Commissioner Henry intends to discuss this further with the Dakota County Habitat Alliance group.

7b. Staff Updates

Zabel remarked that everyone has no doubt noticed the absence of Jen Dullum at this meeting. Jen has chosen to leave employment with Dakota County/VRWJPO as of Friday (January 8, 2021) and has accepted employment with a private consulting firm. We wish her well in her new venture.

Mark Ryan shared that the VRWJPO is working with the City of Lakeville doing a bank stabilization on about a mile of Middle Creek in a tributary east of a previous restoration project done a few years ago. Ryan highlighted areas where some specific practices will be implemented on some meander cut banks. He showed both aerial views using GIS and photos taken on-site. Construction is underway now, and Ryan noted that winter construction is unusual on VRWJPO projects, but because this reach is not designated trout stream, work can be done in the winter. Housing is being constructed nearby as this project is underway, and one consideration of doing this project now was to complete the restoration work prior to the entire development being complete to make the project less intrusive.

Ryan then used GIS to describe potential projects to address ravine erosion in Ravenna Township near and west of County Road 54 (Ravenna Trail). Dakota County is putting out a request for proposals to do

some ravine stabilization in this area. There is about 100 feet of fall in some of these ravines. While the engineering budget is from the County, VRWJPO staff will also be involved to provide their input on the design approach.

Chair Henry asks if the WPC could receive a progress report on the Braun Wetland Bank restoration project. Coudron is involved some with the project but agreed with Chair Henry that Dakota SWCD staff, John Stelzner, who is managing much of the project day-to-day, could present a more detailed update.

Paula Liepold is providing some additional support to the VRWJPO in the absence of a communications and outreach staff. Paula listed several of the programs and activities that she will be covering in the interim. Zabel mentioned that he is bringing the open position before the Joint Powers Board for their concurrence to fill.

8. Adjourn

Motion by Commissioner Betzold, second by Commissioner Clanton, to adjourn the meeting at 4:45 p.m. The motion passed on an 5-0 roll-call vote.