



Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting

August 11, 2021 – 4:00 p.m.

In-person and Zoom Videoconference

WPC Members in Attendance

Carolyn Miller Chuck Clanton
Josh Borton James Kotz
Ken Betzold Tony Wotzka
Andy Riesgraf

Staff in Attendance

Mark Zabel, VRWJPO
Mark Ryan, VRWJPO
Brita Moore-Kutz, VRWJPO
Travis Thiel, VRWJPO

Others in Attendance

Curt Coudron, Dakota County SWCD

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order by Vice-chair Betzold at 4:05 p.m.

2. Roll Call

All members present except Mark Henry and Stephen Hamrick.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

None.

4. Approval of Agenda

Vice-chair Betzold asked for approval of the agenda.

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Borton, to approve the agenda. The agenda was unanimously approved by a 7-0 vote.

5. Approval of Minutes

Vice-chair Betzold requested any adjustments to the minutes as presented. Upon hearing none, Vice-chair Betzold called for a motion to approve the minutes of the July 14, 2021, meeting of the WPC.

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Kotz, to approve the minutes of the July 14, 2021, meeting, as distributed. The minutes were unanimously approved by a 7-0 vote.

6. Business Items

a. Recommendation to Adopt the VRWJPO 2022 Draft Budget

Vice-chair Betzold called on Mark Zabel to introduce the item. Zabel opened a PowerPoint presentation that described the overall budget revenues and expenses and described the levy of the Watershed Management Tax District. Zabel also presented changes to the draft 2022 budget in comparison to the adopted revised 2021 budget. The overall revenues for 2022 are estimated at \$1,942,600 with estimated expenses of \$1,778,860 and a cash reserve of \$163,740 (8.4% of the budget total, which meets the VRWJPO Fund Balance Policy). Revenues include estimated carryover from unspent funds from 2021, grant funded project revenue, the Watershed Management Tax District Levy, and investment earnings from funds held in account. Zabel asked if WPC members had any comments of any suggested changes to the draft budget.

Motion by Commissioner Kotz, second by Commissioner Borton, for recommendation to the VRWJPB to adopt the VRWJPO 2022 draft budget. The motion was unanimously approved by a 7-0 vote.

b. Mid-term Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan Review

Mark Zabel referred to a spreadsheet containing all goals and actions from Section 6 of the Watershed Management Plan that was shared via email. There were responses from seven members in prioritizing actions identified by staff as either future or ongoing status as either a high, medium, or low priority. Zabel reported the results as sorted in the spreadsheet from results receiving the highest cumulative scores to the lowest cumulative scores and then secondarily for those with the same cumulative scores according to the mode (the score occurring most often among the ranks provided). Zabel reported that the first three highest ranked priorities show the general philosophies that carry through in the prioritization, that is, collaboration seems to be highly valued, assuring that people follow standards seems to be valued, and applying for and receiving grants (getting money from other people) seems to be important for us to pursue. There is a bell curve with few actions listed as the top priorities and few as the bottom priorities, with most in the middle. Commissioners Clanton and Miller commented that there are too many line items. Commissioner Clanton commented that he viewed education as a high priority and that actions that are effective in addressing issues with the river (proximity). This is about allocating a limited amount of resources to achieve the greatest effect. Commissioner Clanton brought up septic systems and how much of a role the VRWJPO should have in addressing those issues. Zabel commented that there are some issues that are brought into the Watershed Plan that are there to assure that someone is properly addressing them; looking over others' shoulders to make sure it is getting done (septics or abandoned wells). The 2016-2025 was not developed in a vacuum and some of the actions that are there are issues that were brought to the table through the open, public process. Commissioner Kotz mentioned that he actively ranked some of the lines that addressed drought higher as an expectation that the conditions that we are seeing now are likely to occur more frequently in years to come. Zabel commented that he knows that there are actions in the Plan that address more extreme weather events and that goes both ways, both wet and dry. Commissioner Clanton asked what portion of the actions are required as compared to what actions are there by our (VRWJPO) choice or optional. Some are required to be done, no matter what their priority rank is. Then there is the issue about level of effort where some action can be completed in a matter of minutes (post a link to an agency guidebook) where others may be staff or money intensive and take years in the planning and execution. Commissioner Betzold asked if Zabel found anything in the results surprising-. Zabel replied that results did match up with expectations well. The collaboration, enforcement, and applying for grants as the highest priorities is what we would have expected, and the members of the Joint Powers Board have also encouraged those aspects. Commissioner Kotz asked if there were some results that staff may have seen as an issue where members were not interpreting the issue correctly. Zabel commented that there

were issues that he saw where acronyms may have been an issue. He asked if everyone knew what LID stands for as they may not see it as “Low Impact Development”, a design approach meant to reduce environmental impacts from development. Commissioner Clanton returned to the issue of how much of the Plan actions can be accomplished given the resources available. Thiel asked if it would be valuable for a column to be added that estimates the level of effort required for the action. With that addition there would be some judgement as to the combination of the level of priority with the level of effort. Commissioner Clanton suggested that perhaps those actions that are requirements, those that must be done regardless, not be considered in the ranking since there isn’t any getting around those anyway. Commissioner Miller asked about the larger picture functions of the VRWJPO, are we more of a regulatory body, a monitoring and research body, or more oriented toward implementing infrastructure (improvement projects). Zabel commented that we are all of those. Commissioner Miller commented that those considerations were an issue for her prioritization. Commissioner Miller chose to prioritize the physical aspects including actions that lead to projects. She said it’s all good stuff, but it was difficult to know which way to go with things. Mark Ryan commented that there have been comments over time from WPC members regarding the “edge matching” and trying to avoid overlap with other partners or entities, which can be considered in reviewing the prioritization results. Brita commented that in the communication aspect there are often opportunities to either simply promote or directly partner with others in delivering or developing messaging that supports messages for mutual benefit. Commissioner Kotz commented that he prioritized with the idea that nothing would necessarily be “left out” but with the expectation that there is a limited amount that can be accomplished with limited resources. Zabel noted that he would be sharing the spreadsheet back out to members so that they can see how ranking came out and provide any further comments and thanked members for submitting their priorities.

7. Updates

a. Chairperson’s Report

Vice-chair Betzold had nothing to report.

b. Staff Updates

Curt Coudron commented that Dakota County SWCD staff continue to engage in implementing projects. There are some limitations while crops are in the fields but there are still some project opportunities underway. There is a project near Hampton that was set up last year with some grassed waterways that is now incorporating water and sediment control basins. There will be some planting of cover crops in fields that have some canning crops coming out. There has been a lot of use of the prairie planting program (native vegetation).

Brita reported that the VRWJPO is supporting a display at the Dakota County Fair in the Natural Resources Building. She was also given a tour of the prairie restoration just south of the Dakota County Fairgrounds. Brita attended the Salt Symposium (virtual) put on by Fortin Consulting in cooperation with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and other partners. Although the Symposium has something of a Minnesota focus, it included participants from around the United States. Brita highlighted an airport in Des Moines, Iowa that has implemented a heated runway as a means to manage snow and ice and reduce salt use. Brita has plans to participate in the Farmington Schools Pollution Prevention Day on September 10th. Toward the end of September, she will be assisting with Outdoor Education Days in coordination with Dakota County SWCD. Brita mentioned that the VRWJPO is planning to conduct its biennial Watershed Tour, currently scheduled for Wednesday, September 22nd, starting at 1:30 p.m., departing from the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center. Brita is planning to attend Starry Trek as a volunteer for this scheduled event for August 21st at Lebanon Hills Regional Park sponsored by

Dakota County. Brita is going through the VRWJPO Communications Plan and making some adjustments. Brita asked members to like the VRWJPO on Facebook and to engage with the VRWJPO on social media through Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Mark Ryan mentioned that he and Travis Thiel are both working on applications for Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) Clean Water Fund Competitive Grants. The application Mark Ryan is completing is for a ravine stabilization project in collaboration with Dakota County in Ravenna Township.

Travis Thiel mentioned he is completing an application for a stormwater basin project in Foxborough Park in Lakeville capturing sediment and phosphorus before it reaches North Creek. Travis also mentioned working on an application to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Conservation Partners Legacy Grant for habitat improvements on East Lake. The lake has common carp and goldfish in it. To assist with management, the plan would be to place a fish barrier and then pursue some carp and goldfish removals to bring numbers down to a manageable level and reduce negative impacts to the lake.

Commissioner Betzold commented that he had seen a for sale sign on the wetland bank off of Blaine Avenue. Zabel responded that the easement for the wetland bank is established for that property and that it is a perpetual easement held by the State of Minnesota that runs with the property and requires it to remain wetland. That property can have other limited use, such as hunting, but it cannot be built on, developed for other purposes, or cropped. The owner has the right to sell or lease the property, and the owner is still responsible to pay taxes on the property.

8. Adjourn

Motion by Commissioner Borton, second by Commissioner Kotz, to adjourn the meeting at 5:18 p.m. The motion passed on a 6-0 vote.