



Meeting Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board Meeting

June 23, 2022, 1 p.m., In-person and Teleconference using Zoom

Board Members in Attendance

Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik, Chair

Scott County Commissioner Tom Wolf, Vice Chair

Dakota County Commissioner Mary Liz Holberg, Secretary/ Treasurer

Others in Attendance

Janssen Hang, Hmong American Farmers Association via teleconference

Georg Fischer, Dakota County, Physical Development Division Director

Ashley Gallagher, Dakota County SWCD, Resource Conservationist

Mark Zabel, Dakota County, VRWJPO Administrator

Melissa Bokman-Ermer, Scott County, Watershed Co-administrator

Travis Thiel, Dakota County, VRWJPO Senior Watershed Specialist

Mark Ryan, Dakota County, VRWJPO Watershed Engineer

Brita Moore-Kutz, Dakota County, VRWJPO Communications and Outreach Specialist

Paula Liepold, Dakota County, Water Resources Education Specialist

Paul Beaumaster, Dakota County, Assistant County Attorney via teleconference

1. Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Commissioners Slavik, Holberg, and Wolf were in attendance.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

There were no comments from the audience.

4. Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Agenda
- b. Approval of Minutes from the April 28, 2022, meeting
- c. Acceptance of Treasurer's Report

Res. No. VRW 22-10: Motion by Commissioner Holberg, Second by Commissioner Slavik and passed on a 3-0 vote to approve the consent agenda.

5. Approval of Expenses

Mark Zabel presented the current expenses for approval as shown on item 5.

Res. No. VRW 22-11: Motion by Commissioner Holberg, Second by Commissioner Wolf and passed on a 3-0 vote to approve the expenses totaling \$120,036.30 incurred between April 13, 2022 and June 12, 2022.

Business Items

6a. Report on Measurable Outcomes as Identified in the 2016-2025 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan

Mark Zabel introduced the topic and noted that an Executive Summary of the Measurable Outcomes Report was provided and that the full report is available.

Brita Moore-Kutz provided highlights of the Measurable Outcomes Report to the Board members. The current report updates data from the last two years into comprehensive assessments of progress and trends. Brita noted significant increases in website visits and social media. Commissioner Slavik noted that the Measurable Outcomes Report is directed to the Board and is available to the public. Commissioner Slavik asked if there is anything associated with the report that is required by any of our other partners. Mark Zabel noted that the 2016-2025 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan identified a set of Measurable Outcomes included as a section of the Plan. The Measurable Outcomes section of the Plan provided a list of outcomes but did not specifically identify the data or criteria to be measured. After Plan adoption staff identified data elements that could be collected and reported. The Measurable Outcomes Report provides the means of updating and reporting on the outcomes for which measures have been identified. This provides the “so what” of our activities.

6b. Approval to Award Contract to Minnesota Dirt Works for Almquist Sediment Basin Restoration Project.

Mark Ryan introduced the item. The project is restoring functionality to old sediment basins that were constructed years ago. The project is funded, in part, through grant funds through the Watershed Based Implementation Fund. \$59,000 is provided through the grant and \$26,000 is provided through VRWJPO match. Four quotes were received on the project, Minnesota Dirt Works was the low quote. Mark Ryan pointed out that the Request for Board Action includes authorization to allow the Administrator to execute the contract. This request allows for finalization of work with the landowner on a maintenance agreement. The contract will be executed after the maintenance agreement is finalized and signed. Commissioner Slavik asked if this involves a single landowner or multiple landowners. Mark Ryan responded that one basin is right on a property line and that because of the location, it involves access agreements with two landowners, but a maintenance agreement with only one of those landowners. The maintenance agreement is a requirement of the grant funding to ensure that the practice remains in place and operational for its expected design life. Commissioner Holberg asked if there is a remedy for a failure to maintain. Mark Ryan commented that remedy would be determined in the event of a maintenance issue.

Res. No. VRW 22-12: Motion by Commissioner Holberg, Second by Commissioner Wolf and passed on a 3-0 vote to approve authorization to award a contract to Minnesota Dirt Works for the Almquist Sediment Basin Restoration Project.

6c. Strategic Planning for 2022

Mark Zabel introduced Ashley Gallagher of the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District as the facilitator. Mark Zabel covered the mission statement of the VRWJPO as it appears in the 2016-2025 Watershed Management Plan. Commissioner Holberg asked when the mission statement was adopted. Zabel responded that the mission statement was adopted as part of the development of the 2016-2025 Management Plan. The statement itself was adopted in 2015. The Plan identifies seven essential functions. These essential functions are also used in budgeting and reporting as a means for organizing our information. Another action taken with the 2016-2025 Watershed Management Plan was to begin to organize and focus on the subwatershed level. The Plan includes a prioritization of a targeted level of effort for each subwatershed. This doesn't imply how things are implemented, as much of our implementation activity is based on opportunity, but it does indicate a desired level of effort. The areas in the upper parts of the watershed are generally prioritized at a higher level in comparison to areas downstream with the idea that actions taken in the upstream areas will provide benefits downstream.

Ashley asked for the Board's priorities. Mark Zabel noted that the Board went through a strategic planning process in 2019 and the slides for this part of the session are the same as used at that session. The Commissioners provided comments identifying clean water, leveraging outside funding, not burdening taxpayers, getting results for our efforts, getting return on investment, leveraging people to engage voluntarily in addressing issues, being aware and flexible in addressing the economic environment, as priorities.

The next question asked if there are areas that require more, or less, focus. Commissioners noted the lack of resident interest to serve on the Watershed Planning Commission as a problem that needs attention. Commissioners also hope to retain a focus on getting projects implemented, streamlining procedures to allow greater direct action, continued improvements in outreach – telling our story, and getting acknowledgement from partners extending our positive profile.

The next question asked about communication with the Board. Commissioners referenced regular email reports that are provided by staff as being helpful. Commissioners also commented that they appreciate being informed early as to scheduled events so that they are both aware and can provide support. Commissioners were comfortable with direct email notices from staff for updates and events.

The next question asked about the strengths of the VRWJPO. What do we do well? Commissioners commented that the VRWJPO has been successful at accessing a lot of outside money for the organization. Mark Zabel commented that staff have always strived to be as transparent as possible in all our business and activities. Commissioners reiterated that one of our strengths is reflected in our recent communication activities. Commissioners noted that City and Township officials have expressed a high regard for VRWJPO staff actions and collaboration.

The next question asked what VRWJPO projects or programs have been successful and why. Commissioners identified water conservation projects, in particular the irrigation audit program and stormwater reuse projects, as successes. Of note is that since the inception of the irrigation audit and cost-share program with the City of Lakeville, the cities of Apple Valley and Rosemount have also partnered in the program. Commissioners also mentioned the wetland bank as a success. Commissioners commented that stories of people engaging in activities like tree planting or putting in raingardens is a success showing positive actions taken voluntarily in partnership with the VRWJPO.

The next question was on weaknesses or things that we do not do well and need strengthening. Commissioners felt that most people aren't aware of the VRWJPO or what we do. Commissioners also

would like to see more engagement with city councils and township supervisors reporting local activities done in partnership – a concise presentation. Commissioners would like to see more attendance at our watershed tour.

The next question was on what projects or programs are unsuccessful. Projects need to set clear expectations at their outset, and Commissioner Holberg brought up a project example with the Minnesota Zoo that struggled with expectations and goals.. Our volunteer developments to date have not been up to expectations of Commissioners. The investments of money and time have not brought about the desired results.

The next question addressed opportunities, asking what success looks like for the VRWJPO. It was suggested that volunteer opportunities could be developed and “prepackaged” to attract opportunities for organizations or corporations interested in involvement to “sign on.” Tell our stories in a manner that is understandable by the public.

There was a question from a representative of the Hmong American Farmers Association about VRWJPO involvement in development and design of an interchange at U.S. Highway 52 and County Road 66. Travis said he and Mark Ryan have been involved with the Dakota County Transportation Department in review of preliminary plans for this interchange providing input on how certain environmental impacts might be measured. Doug Abere of the Dakota County Transportation Department is the lead on the evaluation of this project.

The next question was regarding what threats or challenges might be encountered by the VRWJPO over the next five years. Commissioners commented that inflation and other economic conditions may impact planning and operations. The possibility of drought or impacts due to extreme weather events is a consideration. Growth and development are continuing trends. How do we mitigate these threats? Planning and budgeting considerations need to consider the emerging economic environment. Developing water storage opportunities in the watershed will provide a means to reduce peak flows that could result from higher levels of runoff from severe storms or snowmelt events. Access federal grant dollars that align with the needs of the watershed.

Focus on communications.

- What are the goals of communications and outreach? We want people to know who we are. Do engagement with local policy makers. Share our positive stories with the public. Get credit for our investments.
- How can we best reach people in the watershed? Through existing structures. Use the Board Members to greater advantage.
- What needs attention from staff? Identify the opportunities with policy makers. Looking for communication opportunities within the watershed – city newsletter, content provided through other external outlets. Are we better off today than 10 or 20 years ago.
- Suggestion for a tri-fold brochure that could be put in local display racks.
- Suggestion for clean up events. Also there was a suggestion to get press/media coverage at such events.

Focus on Capital Improvement Planning

Mark Ryan provided a current draft 5-year CIP plan and a handout showing what has been spent on project implementation. \$5.6M has been spent overall on project implementation for the 2016-2025 planning cycle to date. Of that \$5.6M, the VRWJPO has spent about \$1.4M of its own money on project implementation. Within the 2016-2025 Plan, the target for implementation over the ten-year life of the Plan is a total of \$2.2M. Thus, the current CIP implementation to date has exceeded Plan expectations by \$3.4M. Current CIP planning for the remaining life of the Plan contains expected expenditures of another \$4.8M, of which VRWJPO funds may be up to \$1.2M. The amounts planned for expenditure by subwatershed also exceed planned spending, except in the Upper Mainstem (Headwaters) area. Project opportunities have not emerged in that area in part due to not having project partners come forward. Further assessment may identify project opportunities and hopefully implementation with willing landowners. We have built up some CIP reserve money over the past couple of years. CIP reserves could be applied to future CIP projects that require a greater share of VRWJPO participation when a project is not funded largely through a grant funded revenue source. The East Lake Fish Barrier project, which did not receive a grant applied for in 2021 was discussed as an example where funding from the VRWJPO could be applied as a greater share of the total cost. Commissioner Holberg reiterated that this document should have more indication that it is a “draft” document for planning purposes.

Staff Reports

Travis Thiel

Travis prepared a report on the Irrigation Audit and Cost-share Program as requested at the previous Board meeting. Travis walked through highlights of a written report for the Commissioners. The report shows comparisons of water use by participating partners previous to audits and after implementing improvements. There are reductions in use at all locations except one. Reductions based on cost of water (city rates) show a return on investment of approximately 1,000%; for every dollar spent, there is a savings of approximately \$11 due to reduced water use. It should be noted that the City had identified the largest water users first and so this result must be tempered as it is not likely typical of what may be expected for others. Travis also did an analysis based on water use comparison with watering needs to maintain turfgrass. This analysis clearly shows that improvements implemented addressing irrigation audits reduced water use to the maintenance needs of the targeted landscape. Commissioner Holberg asked if this program is being replicated elsewhere. Travis noted that similar programs target audits and improvements to homeowners. These programs may not match the VRWJPO program as a cost-share program, but they do incentivize water use reductions. Mark Zabel commented that another area that the VRWJPO has not yet explored is the reuse of stormwater to provide irrigation water in surrounding neighborhoods. Travis commented that cost of water has been relatively low and so there has not been great interest in these types of systems. As cost of water rises, it provides incentive for interest in these types of projects and practices.

Melissa Bokman-Ermer

Melissa reported that some progress is being made on narrowing down hot spots within the upper watershed for high bacteria counts. More targeted sampling has been done which has provided more information about where high counts are occurring and narrowing the focus to where sources may be located.

Adjourn

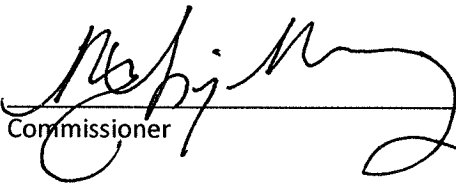
Motion by Commissioner Wolf, Second by Commissioner Holberg and passed on a 3-0 vote to adjourn the meeting at 3:05 p.m.

Next Meeting Date: Thursday, July 28, 2022, at 1 p.m. in Conference Room A at the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center, 4100 220th Street West, Farmington, MN.

Respectfully submitted by

Mark Zabel
Administrator for the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization

Attest



Commissioner Secretary/Treasurer

7-28-22
Date