



Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting

July 12, 2023 – 4:30 p.m.

In-person and Microsoft Teams Videoconference

WPC Members in Attendance

Linda Larson Brad Blackett
Josh Borton Andy Riesgraf
Steve Hamrick Jim Kotz
Kevin Chamberlain

VRWJPO Staff in Attendance

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

Others in Attendance

Curt Coudron, Dakota County SWCD
Nikki Stewart, Dakota County (Virtual)
Valerie Neppl, Dakota County

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jim Kotz at 4:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call

All members present except Sandra Weber.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

No comments.

4. Approval of Agenda

Chair Kotz asked for approval of the agenda.

Motion by Commissioner Larson to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Borton. Motion carried on a 7-0 vote.

5. Approval of Minutes from the June 14, 2023 Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Borton, seconded by Commissioner Riesgraf. Motion carried on a 7-0 vote.

6. Business Items

a. Introduction of the VRWJPO 2024 Draft Budget

Mark Zabel presented the first draft of the 2024 budget as an information item. He noted the position openings for the Water Resources Engineer and Administrator may result in cost savings in Dakota County staff time. Increases to staff time in the Research and Planning Section are to support the 2026-

2035 Watershed Management Plan update. There was an increase in funding allocated to the Scott County portion of the Vermillion River Monitoring Network and increase in electrofishing. VRWJPO decreased funding to Scott County outreach efforts and allocated new funding for low input turf workshops with Dakota County SWCD. The other budget changes were in Land & Water Treatment – Capital Improvement Projects as a cost-share placeholder for grant match projects. Mark explained how the Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) program with Board and Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) works, allowing cities to contribute project ideas and receive funding allocated by BWSR. There is a decrease in Feasibility/Preliminary Studies, and Irrigation Audits have been zeroed out from the 2024 budget. Many WBIF grant projects have been zeroed out since they have been completed or are expected to be completed.

The East Lake habitat improvement project was accidentally left out of the 2023 revised budget, an error corrected at the June Joint Powers Board (JPB) meeting. The budget items will carry over to 2024 and 2025. The Foxborough Park Total Suspended Solids (TSS) project, which is underway, has \$25,000 plus \$1,500 cash match carrying over to 2024 to ensure everything came out correctly with the project. Same with the Ravenna Trail Ravine Stabilization project. Middle Creek at Dodd Blvd. stream restoration and East Lake Fish Barrier have funding allocated for next year, the work on those projects should begin soon. Lake Alimagnet Alum Treatment Feasibility Study is complete, staff will be considering a grant application for implementation. WBIF grant administration will be done in kind from now on.

The wetland bank expects to have more credits released by the end of summer, maybe as much as 10 acres. No credits have been sold this year since it has been sold out. Once there is enough money in the account, VRWJPO will look into doing another wetland restoration.

The subtotal of expenditures comes out to \$1,955,740, with a cash reserve of \$102,560, for a total expense of \$2,058,300.

On revenue, the numbers that changed include Clean Water Fund competitive grants, a Conservation Partners Legacy Grant, and WBIF monies, as well as CIP reserve. For the tax district levies, information from the assessor about tax capacities for Dakota and Scott was not available in order to distribute the levy of expected \$1 million. That brings the revenue to \$2,058,300. These numbers are not expected to change dramatically before the official approval in August.

Information item only.

b. Update on development of the 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan

With the authorization of the JPB, VRWJPO solicited comments over a 60-day period from required review agencies on priorities for the 2026-2035 Plan. Mark Zabel walked through the various comments received, including from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), BWSR, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Metropolitan Council, Dakota County Groundwater Protection Unit and Water Resources Unit, SWCD, and the cities of Empire, Rosemount, and Apple Valley.

Commissioner Larson asked about regional water supply planning. Mark noted the Met Council's comments on that matter for drinking water.

Commissioner Riesgraf asked about environmental justice in watershed management plans. Mark said he's seen other plans address demographics and underserved populations, and that we will consider how we communicate with groups of people we haven't reached very much. Environmental justice considers how projects have an impact on people living in the area. Commissioner Larson said she'd heard of efforts to incorporate more trees and green spaces into lower-income neighborhoods as an example.

Of note from Rosemount's comments is that they are looking to construct stormwater outlets toward the Vermillion River. This isn't a huge issue as most stormwater in Rosemount infiltrates into their sandy soils normally, but landlocked basins can still get flooded. If we were to have a 1,000-year flood, we would need to ensure there's enough storage to protect homes in the area.

Commissioner Blackett expressed concern about the gravel pits and their effect on groundwater, since one of the planned stormwater outlets is discharging towards a gravel pit. Valerie pointed out that ordinances require cities and townships to have provisions in place to be able to do this. Dakota County and the Dakota County SWCD have created a model mining ordinance for preventing groundwater contamination.

Valerie said she hoped for more opportunities for collaboration between VRWJPO and the Groundwater Protection Unit. Valerie will also be serving in an interim role for Board and Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) administration while we search for the next Administrator.

Commissioner Larson asked if per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) was an issue anywhere in the watershed and if gravel pits had any effect. Valerie's team recently published a study on PFAS in private wells in Dakota County, which found some wells in the eastern part of the county with levels above the proposed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standard. The sandy soils in that area make groundwater particularly vulnerable. She hasn't seen a lot of issues because of the gravel pits.

Commissioner Riesgraf asked what the biggest source of chloride pollution is. Valerie said road salt is the biggest contributor, particularly near large highways and roads. Second is water softening treatments in wastewater (Empire's plant discharges directly to the Mississippi River). It's difficult to find the best way to address it. VRWJPO and Dakota County has been supporting Smart Salting trainings for the past few years with the MPCA for applicators to make salt use more efficient. Brita shared about the Salt Symposium, a virtual event at the beginning of August led by Connie Fortin, and Smart Salting for Local Leaders. She also pointed out the recent WBIF funding of a salt brine truck for Rosemount for lower-salt de-icing. Travis agreed that it's easier to focus on snow management to prevent dangerous icy areas. Other de-icing technologies are in early research stages.

The next step for the Plan is to set a public meeting as the kickoff for the plan development. That meeting will be set by the JPB at their August meeting and will likely be in September 2023.

7. Updates

a. Chairperson's Report

No updates.

b. Staff Updates

Curt Coudron

Curt talked about a recent prairie restoration in Ravenna Township, reconstructing two waterways to prevent gullies, and cover crops for local farmers. The SWCD is doing more project planning and surveying right now.

Valerie Neppi

Valerie brought up the model mining ordinance again, as well as the ongoing irrigation water testing for nitrogen by the Groundwater Protection Unit and Dakota County SWCD for farmers. Some of her staff are doing township tours this month, and Valerie encouraged members to share thoughts for those tours. The Groundwater-Surface Water Collaborative has produced communication materials for the ongoing drought, which specifically addresses reducing lawn irrigation.

Travis Thiel

Travis elaborated on the new low-input turf program in the budget. This is being developed with the SWCD and Groundwater Unit. The goal is to help residents incorporate more low-input fescues and bee lawn mix, which require less water overall than traditional Kentucky bluegrass.

The Foxborough Park project with Lakeville started earlier in the week with excavation. They have 60 days to complete it, somewhat likely they'll finish sooner.

Brita Moore-Kutz

Brita was at the Hastings Party in the Park on July 11. More than 1,000 people are estimated to have attended, most of whom stopped at her table. She gave out stormwater crossword puzzles. She is focusing on drought-related messaging and conservation on social media, using the materials created from the Groundwater-Surface Water Collaborative. She'll be at the county fair next month in the Natural Resources building.

Mark Zabel/Nikki Stewart

With his departure and hiring, WPC members are invited to participate in the interview panel. The job posting will close on July 21, and Nikki hopes to do interview in early August. The Chair of the JPB, Commissioner Mike Slavik, had recommended including a WPC member in the hiring process. Nikki said she would contact the members shortly.

8. Adjourn

Before adjourning, Commissioner Larson congratulated Mark on his retirement.

Motion by Commissioner Larson, second by Commissioner Hamrick. Motion carried on a 7-0 vote.

DRAFT