



Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) Meeting

November 15, 2023 – 4:30 p.m.

In-person and Microsoft Teams Videoconference

WPC Members in Attendance

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

VRWJPO Staff in Attendance

Travis Thiel, Watershed Administrator
Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications & Outreach Specialist
Jeff Dunn, Water Resources Engineer

Others in Attendance

Ashley Gallagher, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District, Resource Conservationist
Mark Henry, Castle Rock Township resident and former WPC member
Nikki Stewart, Dakota County, Environmental Resources Department Director (virtual)
Valerie Neppl, Dakota County, Groundwater Protection Unit Supervisor (virtual)
Paul Beaumaster, Dakota County, Assistant County Attorney & Legal Counsel to VRWJPO (virtual)
Henry Stelten, Prairie Island Indian Community (virtual)

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Josh Borton at 4:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call

All members were in attendance.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

Travis Thiel introduced Jeff Dunn, the new Water Resources Engineer for the VRWJPO.

4. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Commissioner Larson to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Weber. Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.

5. Approval of Minutes from the September 13, 2023 Meeting

*Motion by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Blackett.
Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.*

6. Business Items

a. Presentation on Agricultural Best Management Practices for Nitrate Reduction

Ashley Gallagher shared a presentation on programs and practices to reduce nitrate levels in local water resources, as well as funding available to support Best Management Practice (BMP) adoption. These included the Minnesota Groundwater Protection Rule and Dakota County Agricultural Chemical Reduction Effort (ACRE). She highlighted the Hastings Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA) as an area particularly affected by nitrogen, which includes much of the Vermillion River and many tributaries. Also, she mentioned that Dakota County is second in the state for irrigated crop land.

Commissioners received a copy of Ashley's presentation following the meeting.

Information only.

b. Approval of 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting Dates

Commissioners approved the following dates:

- January 10
- February 14
- March 13
- April 10
- May 8
- June 12
- July 10
- August 14
- September 11
- October 9
- November 20

*Motion by Commissioner Riesgraf to approve the meeting dates, seconded by Commissioner Weber.
Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.*

c. Recommend Adoption of the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2024 Final Draft Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

Travis Thiel reviewed the proposed budget and levy. The proposed levy is for \$1 million across both Dakota and Scott County portions of the watershed. Changes since the draft budget was published in August include funds set aside for Dakota County Planning staff to write the Watershed Plan and an urban water conservation digital marketing campaign with the City of Lakeville. Some of the Capital

Improvement Project line items were also changed due to grant fund distribution from the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources.

*Motion by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the budget, seconded by Commissioner Blackett.
Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.*

d. Update on Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Member Terms and Status

Travis shared the current status of WPC member terms. Commissioners Riesgraf, Kotz, and Hamrick have terms expiring at the end of 2023. Travis asked them to email him with their intentions to serve another term or not.

Travis also brought up the per diem available to WPC members of \$50 per meeting. Any Commissioner who wants a per diem should contact him.

e. Discussion of Watershed Planning Commission Engagement Improvements

The WPC has had some ongoing discussions about engagement over the past year, such as the idea of allowing virtual participation in meetings. Citizen advisory committees such as the WPC are required by state law for watershed organizations, but the content and frequency of meetings is up to each individual committee. Travis posed the following questions to the group:

- What types of information should be provided in order to feel engaged?
 - WPC members may not need to review all joint-powers agreements with other local government units – staff are experts in day-to-day activities - Riesgraf
 - What are they advising?
 - Greater understanding of what, exactly, the WPC is looking at. For instance, what are the concrete results of funding the line items in the budgets? - Kotz
- How often should you meet to feel adequately engaged?
 - Subcommittees to bring in more people from the communities? – Blackett
 - Putting on meetings every month is resource-intensive for staff.
 - Quarterly – Larson, seconded by Weber, and consider monthly optional informal meetings “offline” (slightly complicated because WPC is beholden to open meeting law, though that could be changed through JPA)
 - Every other month – Borton
- What meeting times work best to accommodate meeting participation by WPC members?
 - 4:30-6:30 is ok
- Of the various business the VRWJPO conducts, what business is most critical for the WPC to provide recommendations on?
 - Messages and tools to help communities understand what the watershed is
 - Accountability and transparency for the actions of the VRWJPO
 - Budget
- What do you currently dislike about current efforts to present information and engage the WPC?

- Still not clear to new members what the purpose of the WPC is. Feels like they are just a “rubber stamp.” They were hoping to learn new information and provide outreach to their communities, like a “liaison” role. - Blackett
- Feels like a city planning commission – no one cares until something controversial goes on - Blackett

Travis polled other watershed organizations in the Twin Cities Metro Area and heard a wide variety of responses about what their citizen advisory committees were covering. At present, the Vermillion River WPC makes recommendations to the Joint Powers Board (JPB).

Other comments that fell outside of these questions:

- The watershed should have some kind of discussion series about why water is important to community members. This would also help inform them about the WPC and advise which entity people should go to about various concerns regarding water. And the value of being a good steward. - Larson
- Getting to younger people somehow – what can WPC do? - Weber
- Fears about other states poaching MN water - Weber
- More direction for local MN Water Stewards to get into the communities and spread the word – Blackett
- Talk about the information they are learning

Information only.

f. Update on Watershed Plan Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Brita Moore-Kutz presented an overview of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan. She highlighted objectives and approaches, the timeline, who is included in the stakeholder list, and different ways VRWJPO is engaging with the various stakeholders (public meetings, electronic media, activities, print surveys, and such). She also demonstrated the Social PinPoint map tool hosted on the VRWJPO website and the electronic survey.

Brita encouraged WPC members to communicate about the Plan with their communities’ elected officials. She announced the Phase 1 Community Conversations coming up on January 16 and 24, 2024, in Lakeville and Hastings, respectively.

Information only.

7. Updates

a. Chairperson’s Report

No updates.

b. Staff Updates

Travis Thiel

Reported on the recent proposal for a data center in Castle Rock Township, which would require annexation of an area of the township by the City of Farmington. The water needs are unknown at this point.

Commissioner Weber, who is an officer for Castle Rock Township, added that Farmington has asked for a decision from the Township within a month. The township was not given the company's name, just that it's a proposal for a data center. The company would have to go through an AUAR to lay out impacts on water and traffic, which they may not want to do until they have the site secured. The community members want to know the impacts before committing.

Ashley Gallagher

SWCD is working on their work plan for their services to the VRWJPO in 2024. They have about 1,500 acres of cover crops certified and are helping with on-farm construction projects. Monitoring for 2023 is coming to a close, and preparations for 2024 Landscaping for Clean Water workshops are ongoing.

Brita Moore-Kutz

Brita shared about the Rural Healthy Living Newsletter from the Environmental Resources Department mailed to all rural households in Dakota County. It included a blurb about the Watershed Plan update.

8. Adjourn

Motion by Commissioner Hamrick, second by Commissioner Riesgraf. Motion carried on an 8-0 vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:14 p.m.