



# Minutes

## Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) Meeting

May 8, 2024 – 4:30 p.m.

In-person and Microsoft Teams Videoconference

### WPC Members in Attendance

Brad Blackett  
Josh Borton  
Kevin Chamberlain  
Steve Hamrick  
Andy Riesgraf  
Sandy Weber

### VRWJPO Staff in Attendance

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

### Others in Attendance

Dr. Anne Sawyer, Board Conservationist, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources  
Nikki Stewart, Environmental Resources Department Director, Dakota County (virtual)

#### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Josh Borton at 4:28 p.m.

#### 2. Roll Call

All members present except Commissioner Kotz. Commissioner Larson resigned from the WPC in April 2024.

#### 3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

No comments.

#### 4. Approval of Agenda

*Motion by Commissioner Weber to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Blackett. Motion carried on a 6-0 voice vote.*

#### 5. Approval of Minutes from the February 14, 2024, Meeting

*Motion by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Riesgraf. Motion carried on a 6-0 voice vote.*

## **6. Business Items**

### **a. Recommendation for Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Membership Requirements and Term Limits**

Travis Thiel introduced the request from the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board (JPB) for a formal recommendation from the WPC for revisions to the Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) that formed the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) regarding sections in the JPA dealing with the WPC. Currently, the JPA requires WPC members to live inside the political boundaries of the watershed, and it limits members to two consecutive full three-year terms.

Commissioner Blackett said he recalled discussions about opening membership to people who lived outside the political boundaries of the Vermillion River Watershed, but who have a background and interest in the watershed. This reflects one of the options Travis presented, to allow others to be considered for the WPC regardless of if they own land or live in the watershed, mirroring the options listed in Minnesota Statute 103D.331. Another option shared with the group was to require that members own land in the watershed, but not that they be residents of the watershed.

Commissioner Riesgraf said he didn't see a reason to keep the residency requirement in place. He thought that if someone was interested in serving, they would likely be knowledgeable about the river already.

Commissioner Weber said that people generally have more of an interest in where they live, and that people with expertise could be invited as guests. Commissioner Riesgraf pointed out that the WPC has long had difficulty filling positions. Commissioner Blackett mentioned he'd heard about someone who lived across the street from the watershed boundary but was interested in serving on the WPC and cannot under the current policy.

Travis reminded the group that for vetting people to join the WPC, the applications are reviewed by the Chairs of both the WPC and JPB.

*Motion by Commissioner Riesgraf to recommend removing the verbiage from the JPA requiring WPC members to be residents of the Vermillion River Watershed, seconded by Commissioner Weber. Motion carried on a 6-0 vote.*

Regarding term limits, past discussion had involved the idea of eliminating term limits, while recommending that long-serving members step down if someone new wanted to join. The goal of this is to maintain a quorum, while still encouraging recruitment of new members. The group settled on the option to eliminate term limits and retain three-year terms with the requirement to provide notice for new applicants for Board consideration of appointment of an incumbent member or new applicant.

*Motion by Commissioner Riesgraf to recommend removal of term limits with continued recruitment of new members, seconded by Commissioner Weber. Motion carried on a 6-0 vote.*

**b. Update to Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Regarding VRWJPO 2024 Budget Amendment**

Travis Thiel presented the amended budget, which was revised in April 2024 to adjust the fund balance for underspending and transfers in 2023 and to reflect changes to several budget line items and addition of several other line items since the final budget was approved in December 2023. New and changed items included the Water Conservation/Landscaping for Clean Water Marketing Campaign, capital improvement project cost-share distributions, Wetland Bank Restoration Funds Reserve, and received grants. The Joint Powers Board approved this amended budget at their April meeting.

Commissioner Weber asked how long the alum treatment planned for Alimagnet Lake was going to last. Travis said it should work for about 10 years. Kelly Perrine added that the consultant for this project would be meeting with the Alimagnet Lake Association in June.

The amendments brought the total expenses for 2024 to \$3,757,173 and revenues to \$3,757,173.

*Information only.*

**c. Watershed Management Plan Update: Issue Statements and Goals**

Kelly presented a StoryMap summarizing the 2026-2035 Watershed Plan development process to date.

After a robust stakeholder engagement period, VRWJPO staff sent surveys to the WPC and Technical Advisory Group (TAG), asking them to rate relevance and priority of top issues brought up by stakeholders. Their responses were compiled and shared with the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board at a Strategic Planning Session in March 2024, during which the Board provided more direction for what they'd like included in the Plan. Key points include:

- Make sure the Plan is concise and transparent.
- Ensure actions provide the most impact.
- Place focus on high-quality projects, rather than a high number of projects.
- Edge-match with other plans.
- Consider a prioritization scheme different than the subwatershed approach.

Going forward, staff plan to meet biweekly to solidify Plan structure; link the priority issues from the engagement period with scientific data, other local plans, and VRWJPO capacity; and begin drafting the Plan itself.

Commissioner Riesgraf asked how staff would approach issues that stakeholders brought up but that aren't in the scope of VRWJPO's work. Travis replied that VRWJPO would try to complement other local plans, like the Dakota County Groundwater Plan, so as not to duplicate efforts on given issues. VRWJPO has been directed to focus on things they do well, rather than extend capacity beyond their expertise. Kelly added that staff really appreciated all the public input, even if it can't be fully addressed by the Plan. Brita Moore-Kutz noted that there is a second engagement period planned for later in 2024 to provide continued transparency, though it will look very different from the first phase.

Riesgraf asked about the timeline. Kelly answered that the Plan needed to be approved by March 2026 and that the WPC would likely have another piece to comment on soon. Staff would be focusing on objectives for the Plan and moving towards action items later in the summer.

*Information only.*

#### **d. Presentation and Discussion of VRWJPO 2024 Budget-Identified Capital Improvement Project Updates**

Jeff Dunn and Kelly Perrine updated the WPC on ongoing projects:

- Foxborough Park Total Suspended Solids Reduction – with City of Lakeville and Clean Water Fund Competitive Grant
- Ravenna Trail (Sontag) Ravine Stabilization – with Dakota County, Dakota SWCD, and Clean Water Fund Competitive Grant
- Middle Creek at Dodd Boulevard Stream Restoration – with City of Lakeville and Watershed-Based Implementation Funding Grant
- East Lake Invasive Fish Barrier and Removals – with City of Lakeville, Dakota County, and Clean Water Fund Competitive Grant

### **7. Updates**

#### **a. Chairperson's Report**

No updates from the Chair.

Commissioner Weber mentioned an article from the *New York Times* about groundwater depletion in Minnesota and a citizen group meeting planned the following night regarding proposed data centers in Castle Rock Township and potential re-zoning by the City of Farmington.

#### **b. Staff Updates**

**Brita Moore-Kutz**

- Called attention to one-page summary of the 2023 VRWJPO Annual Activity and Financial Report, a new publication this year to improve engagement with the report.

No other updates since the WPC had received a mid-month update via email earlier that day with relevant staff input.

### **8. Adjourn**

*Motion by Commissioner Hamrick to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Blackett. Motion carried on a 6-0 voice vote.*