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**MISSISSIPPI
WATERSHED
MANAGEMENT
ORGANIZATION**

MEETING MINUTES

Date: March 14, 2023

Attachment 3

Time: 3:00 PM

Location: 2522 Marshall Street NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418

Commissioners in Attendance

Connie Buesgens, Columbia Heights and Hilltop; Jeff Dains, Lauderdale; LaTrisha Vetaw, Minneapolis; Randy Stille, St. Anthony Village; Michael Lukes, St. Paul; and Billy Menz, Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB).

Staff and Guests: Emmy Baskerville, Adam Flett, Dan Kalmon, Abby Moore, Kevin Reich, Udai Singh, and Nancy Stowe, MWMO; Glenda Meixell, Anoka Conservation District; and Amy Juntunen, JASS.

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Stille.

Approval of Agenda

Motion by Dains, second by Vetaw to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Menz, second by Vetaw to approve the minutes of the January 10, 2023 regular meeting and the February 21, 2023 special meeting minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

Consent Agenda

Motion by Menz, second by Buesgens to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Reports from Staff

Stowe noted that a series of presentations will be made in advance of requests for approval regarding amendments to the MWMO Watershed Management Plan pertaining to DEI, climate change, and long-term operations and maintenance protocols and procedures.

MWMO staff are becoming concerned with green infrastructure project installations due to a lack of project maintenance to assure those projects will continue to function as intended. Staff will be identifying causes for lack of maintenance and work to develop programming to alleviate the issue. The process will include development of problem and goal statements, gaps analysis, and recommended actions for programming and approaches to fill gaps. The type of maintenance required depends on the type of project. Raingardens need regular weeding, mulching, supplemental planting, inspections of inlets/outlets, sediment removal, etc. The St. Anthony treatment plant requires cleanout of chambers and periodic adjustment of settings. It is important that installed projects receive continued care and maintenance to preserve the river/watershed ecology as well as the MWMO investment in these projects.

Maintenance has been left to project owners after installation and MWMO has never before conducted inspections of installed projects. The first problem statement is that many projects are not performing as designed due to lack of maintenance. The first goal is to develop programming to address this need.

The gaps analysis shows that operations and maintenance (O&M) plans were not detailed enough or that project design did not consider maintenance needs such as access or agreements/contracts for maintenance. Current MWMO structure does not include staff working with grantees past project installation. Partner information limitations (not knowing how to maintain the project), lack of a skilled work force for maintenance, and lack of inspection of projects installed are additional gaps.

Potential approaches are assessed by staff for impact (number of gaps filled) and ease of implementation. Fourteen possible approaches were assessed and key barriers to each identified. These approaches were then ranked for viability and reduced to the three highest ranked, which are 1) providing support for project owners, 2) strengthening grant agreements, and 3) workforce development. Staff will develop programming and a vision for these three approaches and detail what is required by staff to implement.

Supporting project owners includes staying connected after installation, performing project inspections, providing technical assistance and helping to facilitate maintenance. We will need to outline the various types and levels of support needed, explore similar efforts in peer organizations, determine how many projects need maintenance work and prioritize those projects, and pilot the exercise on past projects.

Strengthening contracts will include more compelling or persuasive language, post-grant expectations and performance standards, and require contractors to be certified in green infrastructure maintenance. Staff will discuss options with legal counsel, create performance standards, solicit input from past grantees, and partner on a maintenance certification program.

The vision for workforce development is to include the Green Team, develop an effective program for career pathways, and create a certification program. Pilot an extended Green Team by bringing back former members for more advanced work and exploring partnerships to create a path to careers.

All three approaches will require additional staff time. Staff will evaluate whether the best option will be to use current staff or hire staff to manage this program.

The maintenance issue also overlaps with DEI as regards workforce development. Ensuring projects retain habitat and ecological value is directly related to MWMO climate change goals.

Commissioners gave feedback stating the importance of post project management standards. Future projects should be rated with a degree of difficulty in maintenance. Projects could include engaging community involvement in maintenance. Seasonal staffing for maintenance could be difficult to fill. Could the Green Team partner with grantees for maintenance? It would be important for staff to determine which types of projects tend to be more successful than others and why, in order to inform decisions on future project grants and develop criteria for projects.

Staff are creating a database of projects installed over the past 20 years to index the scope of the problem and identify capital and staffing needs.

General Business

2023-012: Action Grants.

Two Action Grant applications were received and reviewed by staff and the CAC. Staff and CAC recommend that both Action Grants be awarded. Total Action Grant funding for 2023 will not exceed \$67,543.

The first grant application is for Nicollet Island Restoration Phase II at a cost of \$17,543. The grantee is Friends of the Riverfront and the project will improve habitat and water quality in the Mississippi River through ecological planning, restoration work and community engagement. This Action Grant will be used to expand the work outlined within the Nicollet Island Natural Resources Management Plan and will focus on two prairie areas and three forested areas. Active restoration work will include invasive species removal and native plantings for habitat and erosion control. The project includes community engagement for the long-term care and maintenance of the site, incorporates a number of events for involvement, and includes partnerships with Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) and Nicollet Island East Bank Neighborhood Association (NIEBNA) to secure additional funding to continue invasive species management, re-establish a healthy habitat, and intentionally establish diverse community stewardship.

The second grant application is for implementation of a sustainable master plan at CW Lofts, a residential condo property. The applicant is South East Como Improvement Association (SECIA). The applicant developed the sustainable master plan in 2018 with an MWMO Community Grant. Implementation will restore four outdoor areas that are presently turf grass with low-mow fescue bee lawn in three areas and one large raingarden in the fourth area. This is a unique green space within a heavily industrial area of Minneapolis and is the third largest employee center in Minnesota. CW Lofts welcomes employees from many of the area businesses to enjoy their green space and intends to continue outreach to these groups. The grant funds will support the labor and materials to rework the four turf areas as well as final design fees. The CW Lofts resident community is very active and engaged, including a gardening committee that will be responsible for long-term maintenance and report to an elected board comprised of property owners.

New grants do require O&M plans and both projects have site champions and an approach based on long-term stewardship.

Motion by Dains, second by Vetaw to approve Resolution 2023-011 approving the 2023 Action Grants as described and committing \$67,543 from the Stewardship Fund. Motion carried unanimously.

2023-013: Professional Services for UHT Survey and Easements.

This is a request for approval for MWMO to enter into a professional services agreement with Rani Engineering for \$60,000 to provide UHT parcels with revised easement depictions and descriptions, assistance for review and approval of survey documents, and inclusion of materials in the Recording package as each parcel moves toward 100% design. Each of those changes will come back to the Board as part of the REOA.

Motion by Vetaw, second by Buesgens to approve Resolution 2023-013 as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

2023-014: Additional Professional Services for N Columbia Golf Course NW Basin Redesign and Construction.

Staff has been working in this area for the past few years to mitigate localized flooding and lack of water quality treatment. MPRB provided the land for the project and MWMO provided funding for engineering services. The northwest basin was constructed in 2021 as an infiltration basin. However, the basin held water and was not infiltrating due to variability found in the soil type at the surface and deep below the basin due to past fill and varying groundwater levels. The redesign will modify the area to a wet basin to provide water quality treatment and habitat close to the original plan. The design was more challenging than anticipated due to required discussions with the City and MPRB regarding access, easements, and maintenance needs. These discussions resulted in re-work of the design, renegotiating with vendors regarding construction cost, preparing information for partners and dewatering, as well as a 15% increase in the consultant's hourly rate since the 2020 approval, which has resulted in a total consulting budget increase. In 2020 the Board approved \$650,000 under resolution 2020-013 to support professional engineering services by SRF Consulting through the bidding and construction of the project. In 2022 the Board approved \$44,667 for the redesign of the project. Staff is requesting an additional not-to-exceed \$54,773 in Capital Project grant funding to support the additional professional engineering services for this project due to project design changes and delays. The total consulting cost is 15% above the original 2020 budget. The contingency in the construction budget will cover these costs. With current contractor estimates, staff does not believe any additional funding will be needed for construction.

Motion by Menz, second by Vetaw to approve Resolution 2023-014 as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Board Updates and Announcements

Reich noted MWMO's appreciation for Vetaw's comments to highlight and give perspective to the significance of the UHT project in the public forum.

The Kasota Ponds cleanup event has been moved to April 29 due to an educator scheduling conflict. The planning grant proposal was postponed to fall 2023.

Open Public Input

Adjourn

There being no further business, motion by Buesgens, second by Thompson to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.