



**Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District
Minutes of Regular Board Meeting
August 7, 2024**

The Regular Meeting of August 7, 2024, was held at the District Office Board Room, 2665 Noel Drive, Little Canada, Minnesota, and via Zoom web conferencing at 6:30 p.m. A video recording of the meeting can be found at <https://youtu.be/6akHDVA4QG0>. Video time stamps included after each agenda item in minutes.

PRESENT:

Val Eisele, President
Ben Karp, Vice President
Mark Gernes, Secretary
Matt Kramer, Treasurer
Stephanie Wang, Manager

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT

Staff:

Tina Carstens, District Administrator
Paige Ahlborg, Assistant Administrator
Nicole Maras, Regulatory Program Manager
Ashlee Ricci, Grant Program Specialist
Kendra Kloth, Inspections Intern
Mary Fitzgerald, Regulatory Specialist
Dave Vlasin, Project Coordinator
Paul Erdmann, Natural Resources Program Manager
Mia Collazo, Water Monitoring Intern

Consultants:

Laurann Kirschner, Attorney for District
Brandon Barnes, Barr Engineering
Tyler Olsen, Barr Engineering

Visitors:

Magdy Rabeaa, Resident
Amanda Kieffer, TKDA
Cara Jung, TKDA
Amar Subramanian, Resident

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by President Eisele at 6:30 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA (1:32)

No comments.

Motion: Manager Kramer moved, Manager Gernes seconded, to approve the agenda.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. CONSENT AGENDA (1:50)

- A. Approval of Minutes from July 10, 2024
- B. Treasurer's Report and Bill List
- C. Permit Program
 - i. 24-38 3M Building 209 Demolition, Maplewood
- D. Stewardship Grant Program
 - i. 24-36 CS Rabeaa
 - ii. 24-38 CS Pham

iii. 24-41 CS Rowe

Motion: Manager Gernes moved, Manager Kramer seconded to approve the consent agenda.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. VISITOR COMMENTS (2:57)

No comments.

5. PERMIT PROGRAM (3:04)

A. Applications

i. 24-39 Xcel St. Paul Service Center, St. Paul

Nicole Maras provided details on application 24-39 Xcel St. Paul Service Center. Nicole explained that the parcel is located on The Heights redevelopment site and this is part of continuing development at the site while other phases of construction are ongoing. Nicole provided more details on the site location and development plans, noting that the service center would include fleet parking, vehicle storage and an office component. Nicole stated that Xcel is proposing filtration due to poor soils on the site. Nicole went on to provide more details of the site noting that there is a steep slope and stated that it is an interesting site due to its grade. Nicole explained that the proposal includes underground and above ground filtration to meet District requirements. Nicole stated that Xcel is requesting a variance from the district freeboard requirement for the reasons included in the memo.

President Eisele asked for clarification on the reference of drainage pathways pushing to district owned areas.

Nicole Maras stated that the reference is talking about the St. Paul Port Authority and not the watershed district. Nicole explained that they are planning to construct a high number of BMPs throughout the site for shared areas with the understanding that subsequent private development would also need to meet stormwater requirements on their own. Nicole stated that this is why Xcel proposed stormwater treatment, noting that the swales from the previous permit will also treat roadway runoff. Nicole explained that the BMPs would be under the control of the City of St. Paul and it would be expected that Xcel maintains their own parcels unless other arrangements are planned.

Manager Wang questioned how frequently freeboard variance requests occur.

Nicole Maras explained that a freeboard variance is not a common occurrence.

Brandon Barnes confirmed that freeboard variances are not a frequent occurrence. Brandon explained that due to the unique nature of the site, having more than 40 feet of fall along a single parcel, and the overall topography restricts where BMPs can be located. Brandon explained the items that were looked at while reviewing the site with the applicant and explained how those constrictions affect BMP locations and provided more information on the site and the discussions that were had with the applicant.

Manager Karp questioned if the District would hold any liability due to the waiver.

Laurann Kirschner stated that if a permit is granted with a freeboard variance and negative consequences arose it may not be affirmative liability on the District but it would not be something the District would want to grant without proper reassurance that there would not be a negative impact on the District.

Nicole Maras stated that a freeboard variance was granted in 2019 where a memo was signed by the landowner and proposed something similar with the variance being requested for this permit.

Laurann Kirschner agreed.

Manager Gernes requested more information on the operation and maintenance plan and questioned if it would come back to the board for review due to the special provisions.

Tina Carstens stated that the permit would not be given until those special provisions are approved by staff but it would not come back to the board.

Nicole Maras explained that reviewing the operations and maintenance plan is also included in the permit close out process. Nicole stated that if there are design changes from what was originally approved it is made sure that the most accurate information is available to the District for future inspections. Nicole explained that the plan is checked to make sure the operations and management plan created when the permit is issued is still consistent with what was constructed.

Manager Gernes questioned if the permittee is required to provide reporting to the District that maintenance is happening and wondered if it is part of the approved operations and management plan.

Nicole went to explain that there is an operations and management plan as well as a signed legal agreement that specifies what the owner shall do with regards to inspection and maintenance on their end, noting the agreement also allows District staff to complete inspections of the infrastructure and maintenance reporting.

President Eisele stated that he believed it should be kept consistent with other freeboard mechanisms noting that a way should be found to ensure that Xcel is knowingly submitting and taking on this type of responsibility. President Eisele stated that it would be important to get an extra signature from a liability standpoint.

Amanda Kieffer stated that she would need to talk to Xcel's legal team, noting that the biggest concern would be timing. Amanda explained that it would be easier to have one document for additional agreement signatures included in the operations & maintenance plan. Amanda also noted that Xcel is aware that there will be BMPs installed above the elevation of their site.

Laurann Kirschner stated that it could be added to the stormwater maintenance plan agreement. Laurann noted that she would want to see an indemnification and release for any negative outcomes resulting from the variance approval.

Motion: Manager Gernes moved, Manager Wang seconded, to approve permit 24-39 Xcel St. Paul Service Center, St. Paul with the indemnification provision added in favor of the district. There were 4 ayes with Manager Gernes abstaining.

Motion approved.

B. 2024 Inspector Intern Summary, Kendra Kloth

Nicole Maras provided an introduction to Kendra Kloth's 2024 inspector internship presentation. Nicole stated that Kendra had been completed inspection work within the regulatory program throughout her internship. Nicole noted that Kendra will be moving into a permanent position at the District as the Regulatory Technician.

Kendra Kloth provided details of the work she completed during her internship with the District. Kendra explained that her two main responsibilities were construction site inspections and closed permit BMP inspections. Kendra provided details of her work on active construction permit sites, noting that there were 17 sites located across the district that she inspected during her internship. Kendra explained that she would inspect active permit sites on a bi-weekly basis and would look at their erosion and sediment control practices, stormwater management, monitored inlet control, opener control, soil stabilization and permanent BMPs installed on site. Kendra stated that the other aspect of her job was to complete closed permit BMP inspections, where she inspected permanent above ground BMPs installed from

2000 – 2009. Kendra discussed the additional opportunities she had throughout her internship which included shadowing other departments, participating in community events, volunteering, completing underground inspections, additional training and wetland delineation reviews. Kendra ended her presentation by stating that she was happy to be a part of the important and rewarding work being done at the District.

President Eisele stated that he appreciated the information and enjoyed seeing the work District staff does day in and day out, noting that it is not a perspective that the Board got to see regularly.

C. Monthly Enforcement Report

Nicole Maras provided a review of the monthly enforcement report. Nicole noted that there was one staff approved residential permit in July. Nicole provided information on the staff approval process. Nicole highlighted the inspection of The Heights completed by Mary Fitzgerald and shadowed by Manager Wang.

Manager Wang provided information on her experience shadowing the Heights inspection. Manager Wang stated that she learned a lot and was thankful to be able to shadow the inspection.

Manager Gernes asked if site inspections are scheduled ahead of time.

Mary Fitzgerald explained that larger site inspections are scheduled due to consultants being involved. Mary stated that smaller sites are inspected every other week but they are not scheduled.

6. STEWARDSHIP GRANT PROGRAM (41:12)

A. Applications – See consent agenda

B. Budget Status Update

Ashlee provided an overview of the budget status report noting the staff approved projects.

7. ACTION ITEMS (47:26)

A. Fish Creek Tributary Permanent Easement Acquisition

Tyler Olsen provided an overview of the work completed on the Fish Creek Tributary permanent easement acquisition. Tyler stated that over the last month appraisals had been received and reviewed at the staff level. Tyler explained that the next step would be getting approval for the acquisition, noting that after approval Laurann Kirschner would draft purchase agreement documents and discussions would be had with land owners.

President Eisele requested more information on the phrasing ‘without the offer of compensation’ in regards to Bailey’s Nursery property.

Laurann Kirschner clarified that it meant the district would not be paying Bailey’s Nursery for the easement. Laurann explained that this was due to the easement being a small area on the property, noting that the appraiser stated that the easement would not negatively impact the property value.

President Eisele questioned what it would mean if damage was done to that area.

Laurann Kirschner stated that the easement will say that any work completed by the District would be the District’s responsibility.

Manager Gernes questioned if the easement would carry over if the Bailey’s Nursery property were sold.

Laurann Kirschner explained that the easement would carry over to any new property owners, noting that the easement runs with the land.

Motion: Manger Kramer moved, Manager Karp seconded to authorize staff to pursue the acquisition of the permanent easements across the three single-family residential properties within the project boundary and with Bailey's Nurseries.

Motion carried unanimously.

8. ATTORNEY REPORT (53:09)

Laurann Kirschner provided details of the work completed by the attorney's office over the last month. Laurann highlighted the completion of the appraisals for the Fish Creek easements as well as working on the Woodbury Target contractor transition.

9. BOARD DISCUSSION TOPICS (55:02)

President Eisele asked if the Board would be interested in finding ways to engage in accelerated learning opportunities. President Eisele stated that in the past he found tours to be very insightful and helpful and would like to find ways to connect and learn. President Eisele stated that he would work with Tina Carstens on what that would look like as well as creating a proposal.

Manager Gernes stated that he thought it would be a good idea and said that he would welcome more learning opportunities.

Tina Carstens stated that she would be happy to help explore this idea.

10. NEW REPORTS AND/OR PRESENTATIONS

A. 2025 Budget Discussion (58:46)

Tina Carstens gave an overview of the preliminary 2025 budget. Tina provided details of the line items included in the preliminary budget and discussed how that information is used to create the budget.

Manager Kramer stated that he would like to see options to reduce the proposed levy.

Tina Carstens explained that the preliminary budget included what the District would like to complete in 2025 as well as carry over estimates. Tina noted that there is a grant decision that the District is waiting on and explained that receiving the grant would significantly change the levy requirement. Tina explained that if the District does not receive the grant the Board would need to discuss if the District should move forward with the project.

Manager Wang questioned if there is a change in the communication process if the levy remains the same as the previous year.

Tina Carstens explained that discussions are had with cities and the counties with explanations being provided for the levy amount.

President Eisele asked if it would be possible to see a range of options that shows prioritization of projects and levy amounts associated with the prioritization list.

Manager Gernes noted that he saw shifting in the way things are budgeted and wondered what was causing that.

Tina Carstens explained that the shifting was done to further refine the budget, noting there were no significant changes.

President Eisele expressed appreciation for the clarity provided within the preliminary budget.

Tina Carstens stated that she will work with Laurann to produce the public notices for the Pioneer Press and District website.

B. Watershed Approach to Retrofit Projects (WARP) Update Presentation (1:10:15)

Tyler Olsen provided an introduction to the WARP update presentation stating that he would review information on the District's approach to retrofit projects in the past, inventory completed on the retrofit projects in 2023, what WARP is, what methodology was used to create the approach, the heat mapping that was developed from WARP and the pilot use of the framework of identifying retrofit projects for 2025. Tyler explained that the previous approach to finding retrofit projects which included looking at schools, commercial and faith-based organizations, with evaluations of those sites starting at the beginning of 2013. Tyler noted that over 17,000 sites were identified and a grade of A-D were given to those sites with emphasis on cost-effectiveness and water quality improvements. Tyler stated that subwatershed feasibility studies were completed to identify impaired and at-risk subwatersheds. Tyler provided details on how the sites were prioritized, noting that a new tool was created in 2021 to rank potential water quality projects based on criteria that aligned with watershed goals such as achieving quality surface water, managing flooding risks, informing and empowering communities and achieving a healthy ecosystem. Tyler noted that the tool did require project information that is often not available until the design phase is completed. Tyler went on to provide more detail on the work Barr had completed to evaluate past retrofit opportunities, either constructed or evaluated, and mapping the parcels to create a tool to track data. Tyler explained that since the more apparent projects had been completed the goal was to find new projects that align with the Watershed Management Plan and incorporate equity and climate resiliency as well as taking a holistic approach to water quality projects. Tyler stated that this was all taken into consideration when creating the WARP methodology. Tyler reviewed the steps of the WARP methodology including gathering and mapping data, mapping parcels, hosting workshops with RWMWD staff to identify data for scoring, developing scoring metrics, heat mapping to show priority areas and pilot studies which included site visits for potential projects. Tyler detailed how data and parcels were gathered and mapped, noting that the four data layers used were water quality, flooding, natural resources and social vulnerability. Tyler stated that some of the initial data layers included county parcel data, Atlas 14 inundation and impacted structures at both the 100-year and 10-year, social vulnerability index, native plant communities and impaired or at-risk subwatersheds. Tyler went on to discuss a workshop completed with District staff in March 2024 and provided details of that workshop. Tyler continued on to provide more details on the scoring metrics developed for each data layer and stated that they performed spatial analysis using GIS data for each parcel and applied the scoring metrics as well as creating an overall WARP score. Tyler noted that this is done to screen sites and not for prioritization.

President Eisele questioned if the parcel owner's willingness to participate fits into the prioritization.

Tyler Olsen confirmed that the owner's willingness is included in prioritization. Tyler continued on to detail the heat mapping created based on the standard deviation of the total WARP scores. Tyler noted that hot spots included high impervious commercial and industrial areas as well as areas with natural flooding. Tyler stated that this was also used to confirm that past projects would have high WARP scores.

President Eisele questioned if there were areas seen that were surprising to see when compiling the maps.

Paige Ahlborg stated that there weren't any surprising areas and noted that it did validate projects that have been completed in the past such as the work done at Aldrich Arena.

Tyler went on to provide details of the pilot study. Tyler stated the top 100 parcels were reviewed with RWMWD staff and site visits were performed in July. Tyler noted that the site visits included talking with property owners and identifying potential BMPs. Tyler stated that the viability of the sites was confirmed against WARP and were entered into the prioritization tool. Tyler provided information on the top four sites identified using the WARP methodology.

Manager Gernes questioned if there had been an effort to categorize WARP findings from a budget stand point or if it would be best done once the project gets to the feasibility design phase.

Tina Carstens explained that when site visits occur and interest is shown from landowner's, discussion would be had on whether the project category is flood, water quality or natural resources and then the project would be funneled through the that program's funding.

Tyler went on to discuss the next steps which included tracking pilot site visit information in the retrofit inventory web map, creating a technical memo summarizing WARP and annual WARP updates to check against updates to the watershed management plan, new data, scoring criteria, property follow ups as well as working through the list and creating projects for the future.

11. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT (1:36:06)

A. Meetings Attended

No comments.

B. Upcoming Meetings and Dates

Tina Carstens reviewed the upcoming meetings and dates.

C. Staff Anniversaries

No comments.

D. Board Action Log

No comments.

E. Minnesota Watersheds Updates

No comments.

F. Staff Updates

No comments.

12. PROJECT AND PROGRAM STATUS REPORTS (1:41:28)

Project Feasibility Studies

A. Ames Lake Area Flood Risk Reduction Planning Study

B. Phalen Village Flood Risk Reduction

C. Street Sweeping

D. Maplewood Mall 2024 Assessment

E. Watershed Approach to Retrofit Projects

Project Operations

F. Lake-Level Station Maintenance and Rain Gauge Installation

President Eisele questioned how solar would come in to play with the lake monitoring setups.

Dave Vlasin stated that they are all hooked up to power and he had not heard any updates on adding solar. Dave noted that it would be important to make sure there were no potentials for outages when looking at adding solar. Dave explained that he does know of other areas where solar is being utilized in locations where they feel it is fairly safe to use, such as the sand filter near Costco. Dave stated that the District has had solar installations disappear over the years.

Tina Carstens stated that some of the monitoring equipment also utilizes solar power and it would be considered in locations where it made sense.

Manager Wang questioned how the technology used compared to other watershed districts in the Twin Cities.

Tina Carstens explained that there are not a lot of watersheds with a similar level of infrastructure for lake level monitoring.

Brandon Barnes explained that some have infrastructure for rain gauges but the District does have a larger number of lakes being monitored.

Capital Improvements

G. Woodbury Target Store Stormwater Retrofit Project

Manager Gernes asked if things are still on schedule for this project with the recent contractor transition.

Paige Ahlborg explained that it is still on an acceptable schedule.

Dave Vlasin stated the goal for completing the project is September 1.

H. Roosevelt Homes

I. Targeted Retrofit Projects 2024

J. Stewardship Grant Program

President Eisele asked if there were any updates on the Woodland Hills Church project after the findings at the start of the project.

Paige Ahlborg stated that the vault that was located will be filled and left in its current location. Paige stated that the contractor is on site working to complete the project.

K. Pioneer Park Stormwater Reuse

L. Fish Creek Tributary Improvements

M. Cottage Place Wetland Restoration

N. County Road C Culvert Project

O. Kohlman Creek Flood Risk Reduction Projects: Final Design

CIP Project Repair and Maintenance

P. Routine CIP Inspection and Unplanned Maintenance Identification

Q. 2024 CIP Maintenance and Repairs Project

R. Beltline Mississippi Branch Outfall Replacement Project

Program Updates

S. Natural Resources Program

President Eisele stated that he appreciated Paul Erdmann's summary of the Phalen paper "Urban Lake Shoreland Restoration – Landform, Vegetation, and Management Assessment 20 Years Later"

T. Public Involvement and Education Program

U. Communications and Outreach Program

13. MANAGER COMMENTS AND NEXT MONTH'S MEETING (1:49:36)

No comments.

14. ADJOURN

Motion: Manager Gernes moved, Manager Kramer seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 8:19 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.