

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE
COMFORT LAKE–FOREST LAKE
WATERSHED DISTRICT
Tuesday, March 16, 2021**

1. Call to Order

President Spence called the March 16, 2021 special board meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. via online video conference.

Present: President Jon Spence, Vice President Jackie Anderson, Secretary Jen Oknich, Treasurer Steve Schmaltz

Others: Mike Kinney, Emily Heinz (CLFLWD staff); Kevin Biehn, Meghan Funke, Sarah Grandstrand, Greg Graske, Cecilio Olivier, Mike Talbot (Emmons & Olivier Resources); Hanna Valento (Forest Lake City Council)

2. Lower St. Croix One Watershed One Plan

Administrator Kinney noted resolution 21-03-01 has not yet been distributed to the Lower St. Croix (LSC) partners. He suggested the Board may consider a cover memo to accompany the resolution which would detail the issues the Board has identified with the work plan. Manager Schmaltz suggested the cover memo reinforce prioritized, targeted and measurable (PTM) implementation and note 70% of the phosphorus load in the LSC Basin comes from agriculture, and spending should be allocated proportionately. He suggested the memo also reinforce the concepts from Houston Engineering's South Fork Pine PTMApp (Prioritized, Targeted, Measurable Application) Summary.

Hannah Valento joined the meeting and Mr. Kinney noted she is the District's new liaison from the Forest Lake City Council.

Manager Anderson explained the PTMApp is a program that was created collaboratively which encourages the use of PTM practices. She explained CLFLWD's watershed approach to improving water quality in lakes, which is strategic and works from the top of the watershed down. Currently, the District has targeted its top-down approach on a finer scale according to the four lake management districts (LMDs). She referenced the South Fork Pine PTMApp Summary by Houston Engineering. She explained the LSC implementation plan is not as PTM as it should be, and it should utilize the tools available to do so. Manager Anderson explained the proposed hiring of the shared services educator and agronomy outreach specialist. The educator position will merely be an extension of East Metro Water Resources Education Program (EMWREP), and it appears the branding is more aligned with EWMREP than the LSC partnership.

Manager Anderson explained the four points from her March 16th email:

1. The professional hires in Agronomy Support in the Ag areas, and Communication and Marketing are being diverted to local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) programs, and reduced to half time for LSC work, which varies substantially from the approved plan approach. In the Communications and Marketing/ Outreach area; The LSC Collaboration needs its own identity and branding, and the Agronomist position(s) need to be separate from the local SWCD staff and traditional programs and be identified as the LSC Agronomy Program.
2. The selection process for the priority sub-watersheds is not clear and should be made so, following the use of the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) PTMApp computer program.
3. Internal load assessments on the chosen lakes seem premature without clarification on how those water bodies were chosen and why. What data exists on inflow/outflow points of pollution? The inflow points to lakes and streams are typically identified and corrected before internal pollution loads are addressed.
4. The highest phosphorus loads to the Sunrise River are coming from ag fields with row crops and degraded wetlands in the Carlos Avery Department of Natural Resources (DNR) multi-county dam system in the Sunrise sub-watershed. The LSC efforts need to be focused on these already identified top pollution areas.

Manager Anderson explained Mr. Kinney's workload is full with CLFLWD activities alone. She recommended the District hire engineering firm staff members (from the District's engineering services pool) to serve on some of the work plan activity subcommittees as the CLFLWD representative. The engineering staff members could use their technical expertise to guide subcommittee decision making in the right direction. Manager Anderson indicated that if the District is going to be a participating partner, it should try to make a meaningful difference in guiding the implementation toward PTM and a cost-effective use of public dollars.

Manager Schmaltz explained his recommended revisions to resolution 21-03-01:

- Adjust bullet point #2 to reinforce PTM analysis by subwatershed.
- Mention the fact that resource allocation should reflect the main nutrient loading source – poor farming practices. The LSC Partnership should spend more time and dollars on correcting farming practices (i.e., non-structural agricultural best management practices such as cover crops and no-till).
- Add the word “monitoring to the final bullet point: “Projects should incorporate monitoring measurement, associated with water quality outcomes.”

There was consensus to direct Manager Anderson and Manager Schmaltz to work with staff to finalize the proposed revisions to resolution 21-03-01 and bring redlines to the March 25th regular meeting for consideration by the Board. There was consensus to add an addendum to accompany the resolution, further outlining issues with the LSC work plan.

Managers discussed authorizing Mr. Kinney to hire the external engineering resources needed to fill subcommittee positions. Manager Anderson noted there is a cost associated with this, but it is offset by the amount of Mr. Kinney's time saved. Mr. Kinney can devote that time to CLFLWD tasks.

President Spence moved to authorize the Administrator to hire external engineering resources needed to fill subcommittee positions. Seconded by Manager Anderson. Upon a roll call vote the motion carried 3-0.

Manager	Aye	Nay	Absent
Jon Spence	X		
Jackie Anderson	X		
Stephen Schmaltz	X		
Jen Oknich			X

President Spence moved to reconsider the adoption of resolution 21-03-01 at the March 11th board meeting. Seconded by Manager Schmaltz. Upon a roll call vote the motion carried 3-0.

Manager	Aye	Nay	Absent
Jon Spence	X		
Jackie Anderson	X		
Stephen Schmaltz	X		
Jen Oknich			X

President Spence moved to table the motion from the March 11th board meeting to adopt resolution 21-03-01. Seconded by Manager Schmaltz. Upon a roll call vote the motion carried 3-0.

Manager	Aye	Nay	Absent
Jon Spence	X		
Jackie Anderson	X		
Stephen Schmaltz	X		
Jen Oknich			X

3. Greenway Corridor Visioning Workshop

The Board and staff introduced themselves, and Hanna Valento introduced herself. She was appointed by Mayor Bain as the Forest Lake City Council liaison to the CLFLWD. Kevin Biehn facilitated the workshop to discuss greenway corridor visioning. He introduced the Emmons & Olivier Resources (EOR) team involved in the greenway corridor visioning project. A greenway corridor would entail acquiring land, or working with landowners, to preserve a cohesive corridor of natural landscape in order to achieve multiple benefits such as water quality improvement/protection, wildlife habitat preservation, and recreation opportunities. The primary area of focus is Washington Judicial Ditch 6 (WJD-6), through Forest Lake and the Sunrise River, to Comfort Lake. Mr. Bien noted Dakota County has been progressive in greenway corridor planning. Mr. Biehn indicated he would share some information regarding his past work in Chicago, IL.

Mr. Biehn presented information on ecosystem markets related to greenway corridors, such as carbon sequestration, nutrient trading, wetland banking and stream banking. Some key

factors to consider in greenway planning include presence of wetlands, degree of property subdivision, and artificial drainage and ditching. Manager Anderson asked if “greenway” corridor is the common naming of such a project, or if “natural” corridor makes more sense. Mr. Biehn indicated branding and naming is important, and different wording will have different connotations in community members’ minds. Manager Anderson indicated the District doesn’t want to change the landscape into something that it isn’t, and that the District’s aim is to restore the landscape to its original/natural state.

Mr. Biehn presented on land acquisition, which will occur on a multi-decade timeline. Manager Anderson indicated the District’s philosophy is to restore natural watershed characteristics. She indicated it is cheaper to preserve natural landscape and watershed functions than to implement projects to counteract artificial landscape alterations. Mr. Biehn further discussed steps in the master planning process including discovery, visioning, planning, and action. He presented greenway corridors from the lens of three perspectives: conservation (biological preservation and enhancement), projects (water quality and flood reduction), and recreation (access and interconnectivity).

[Manager Oknich joined the meeting at 11:30 a.m.]

Mr. Biehn explained the GIS work that has gone into this effort so far. Manager Anderson indicated public education should be a key component of this effort, i.e., educating the public about the value of wetlands, ecosystem services, etc. Mr. Talbot indicated education overlaps all three categories (conservation, projects and recreation).

Mr. Biehn presented a conservation prioritization map which assigns a weighted prioritization value to every parcel included in the proposed corridor area running from WJD-6 to Comfort Lake. He described where capital improvement projects will fit into the greenway corridor. Mr. Biehn described Sunrise River floodplain and flooding impacts. It isn’t feasible to restore the floodplain to its original natural state because the residential flooding impacts would be too great. One information gap is the lack of knowing basement low floor elevations for the homes and structures within the corridor. Similarly, Mr. Biehn explained, it isn’t realistic to add 4 feet of water back into Shallow Pond, but there does exist a possible intermediate water elevation to restore that wetland while still mitigating flooding impacts to surrounding structures.

Mr. Biehn continued moving upstream, presenting conservation opportunities at the outlet of Forest Lake to the Sunrise River, and upstream of Forest Lake in the WJD-6 subwatershed. He presented options for recreation opportunities within the various greenway corridor sections including new hiking trails and connections to existing trails such as the Hardwood Creek Trail and Swedish Immigrant Trail.

Manager Schmaltz stated there has been a lot of work done on this initiative so far, and it is exciting to see where it will go. Manager Anderson noted there is additional water quality work occurring around Little Comfort Lake and the tributary stream running from Bone Lake to Little Comfort Lake. Manager Schmaltz stressed the element of time – if the District doesn’t act soon, these parcels will get developed and the opportunity for

conservation/nature preservation will be gone. Mr. Kinney suggested board members attend city council meetings as liaisons on this effort. Manager Anderson noted groundwater recharge is another important element of this initiative – protecting groundwater storage for drinking water supply. She explained the District isn't trying to stop development but wants to work with cities to strategically protect the most sensitive areas. Mr. Kinney agreed and indicated nature preservation may be the highest and best use for some of these areas. For example, areas that would frequently be flooded as a result of the changing precipitation patterns occurring in Minnesota as climate changes. Manager Anderson indicated the District is a technical resource for its communities, and the greenway corridor planning effort is a path for achieving multiple benefits. President Spence indicated there doesn't appear to be any opposition on the board as to continuing with the greenway planning effort. Managers indicated the information presented is a good start to this effort. Manager Anderson suggested the District's next step be to provide this information to local communities and ensure the District and cities are on the same page with goal setting.

Mr. Biehn presented proposed next steps which include partner and stakeholder engagement, history evaluation, branding, further identification and vetting of components for greenway, advancement of greenway typologies (i.e., different sections of the corridor; some may be more suburban while others are more rural), quantifying returns, acquisition strategies and acquisition cost estimating. Manager Schmaltz asked how these efforts are normally funded, if there is any value in seeking funding partners such as local businesses, and if there are grant opportunities. Mr. Kinney explained the Minnesota Public Land Trust, Lessard Sams, and other grant/funding opportunities exist. He emphasized the importance of early coordination with communities on this effort. Manager Anderson indicated the District was founded in a collaborative way, with support from all local municipalities.

Manager Schmaltz suggested the District factor the office space and associated potential educational center/community space into the greenway corridor planning effort. Mr. Biehn indicated this element can be included in the planning. The Board thanked the EOR team for the presentation and planning done so far.

Mr. Kinney noted he has a meeting with Forest Lake Area Schools (FLAS) this afternoon. The school district has a strong interest in collaborating with the District on an educational center and creating opportunities for students to get outdoors. Some ideas in discussion include “gateway to the lakes” branding and creation of regional nature parks.

Manager Anderson indicated she is looking forward to moving this effort along, and the presentation slides will be a useful tool to use in communications with partners. The board directed EOR to add more maps to the slide deck which will help illustrate the multiple benefits achieved by greenway corridors. The board directed staff to print copies of the existing slide deck. The board directed EOR to work directly with Administrator Kinney on follow-up tasks and bring a scope to the board if estimated costs necessitate board approval.

4. Adjourn

a) Next regular board meeting – March 25, 2021

Manager Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Manager Schmaltz. Upon a roll call vote, the motion carried 4-0, and the meeting was adjourned at 12:58 p.m.

Manager	Aye	Nay	Absent
Jon Spence	X		
Jackie Anderson	X		
Stephen Schmaltz	X		
Jen Oknich	X		

Jen Oknich, Secretary _____