

WASHINGTON CONSERVATION DISTRICT

JANUARY 9, 2024 BOARD MINUTES

APPROVED

CALL TO ORDER

The regular Board Meeting was called to order at 3:00p.m. by Chair, John Rheinberger.

Members Present: John Rheinberger, Chair
Tim Behrends, Vice Chair
Diane Blake, Treasurer
David Nuccio, Public Relations and Information

Staff Present: Jay Riggs
Shari Larkin

Other Agencies: Chris Schmidt, NRCS
Lizzie Dawson, NRCS
Matt Lundberg, NRCS
Mike Isensee, CMSCWD

2024 BOARD OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

After discussion, it was decided to keep the Officers and Committees the same for 2024. Tim Behrends made a motion accepting the 2024 appointments. David Nuccio seconded the motion. Motion carried.

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO AGENDA

A motion to approve the Agenda was made by Diane Blake, seconded by Tim Behrends. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mike Isensee from Carnelian Marine St. Croix Watershed District issued the following statement to the Board:

In December 2023 the CMSCWD was awarded the watershed of the year award by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. This award was the result of the hard work of the talented and dedicated professionals at the Washington Conservation District.

In 2023 CMSCWD staff time was 3,600 hours while the WCD direct staff time working on our shared goals was 3,900 hours. This this did not include the additional support from the East Metro Water Resource Education Program, Washington County Land and Treatment Funding (free site visits for Washington County Landowners), Wetland Conservation Act assistance, nor State SWCD Funds which contributed another 7,500 hours to our efforts.

But hours only a minor measure of the impact the WCD has in Washington County. The real impact is the decades of experience and unmatched amount of talent WCD has brought and retains in Washington County. The spectrum and depth of expertise of your team is too great to list in one meeting.

So, I am here today to express sincere gratitude from the CMSCWD for WCD's leadership to create and maintain such a great team which played a significant part in the CMSCWD's watershed of the year award.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Items to approve this month are the 2024-2025 BWSR Programs and Operations Grants in the amount of \$70,186; the 2024 Hennepin County Technical Services Agreement in the amount of \$15,000; the 2024 Stillwater Township Technical Services Agreement in the amount of \$5,000; the 2024 City of Afton Technical Services Agreement in the amount of \$5,000; and the 2024 City of Scandia WCA Services Agreement in the amount of \$2,635. A motion to approve the Consent Agenda was made by Tim Behrends, seconded by Diane Blake. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 5, 2023 BOARD MEETING MINUTES

A motion to approve the December 5, 2023 minutes was made by David Nuccio and seconded by Diane Blake. Motion carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Items to note are HP Payment Processing Center in the amount of \$2,820.00 for newsletter printing; Jackson Meadow Neighborhood Association in the amount of \$2,151.25 for a FY22 BSWR HELP Grant; Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust in the amount of \$4,222.00 for insurance; Anderson & Koch Ford in the amount of \$29,977.97 for the new Maverick truck; Metropolitan Council in the amount of \$6,628.25 for lab charges; Peterson Company, Ltd in the amount of \$4,905.00 for the annual audit; Carpenter Nature Center in the amount of \$2,527.00 for a HELP grant expense; Metropolitan Council in the amount of \$9,086.00 for lab charges; South Washington Watershed District in the amount of \$5,109.21 for a HELP Grant expense; Stantec Consulting Services Inc. in the amount of \$1,312.58 for a CPL Grant expense; More Belief in the amount of \$2,500.00 for the new stormwater model; University of Minnesota in the amount of \$9,754.84 for the Agronomist position; . A motion to approve the Treasurer's Report, subject to audit, was made by Tim Behrends, seconded by David Nuccio. Motion carried.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Personnel – There are several items under New Business.

Budget and Finance – One item under New Business.

Cost-Share – One item under New Business.

Communications and Outreach – Nothing to report.

AGENCY / PARTNER REPORTS

County – Nothing to report.

NRCS – The CSP deadline for first round is January 12th. January 19th is the EQIP ranking deadline. There are two applications in Washington County for Act Now that have been pre-approved. This will be the last meeting that Lizzie Dawson will be attending, as she has accepted another position within NRCS.

BWSR – Nothing to report.

MCD/Area IV – The next MCD meeting is February 27th.

Watersheds – Nothing to report.

MASWCD – The Day at the Capitol will be March 13th.

EMPLOYEE REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS/INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

- a. **WCD and EMWREP Outreach** – *See Attached and Newspaper Article Binder.*
- b. **Presentation** – None this month

OLD BUSINESS

- a. **Facilities and Equipment** – There are some items to discuss along with the 2024 budget.
- b. **Equity Initiatives** – Nothing to report.
- c. **Program Updates** – We are preparing the application for phase 1 of the Soil Health Grant.
- d. **2024 COLA** – The WCD historically adopts the County’s Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). The County determines their COLA through negotiations with their unions. After settling with three unions so far, the County indicated the pattern for the wage changes are 3.75% general wage adjustment in 2024 and 2025. Jay is requesting the Board’s recommendation for the 2024 COLA. Tim Behrends made a motion to approve following the County’s COLA of 3.75%. No second to the motion is required. Motion carried.
- e. **2024 Budget and Workplan** – The 2024 budget was presented to the Board. With numbers where they are, Jay is recommending that we sell the Ford Focus and the Toyota Tacoma and purchase the second Maverick on order with the dealership. A motion to approve the 2024 budget was made by Tim Behrends, seconded by Diane Blake. Motion carried

NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Employee Handbook Update** – Approval is requested to update the JET Merit-Based Step Increases, and Enhanced Sick and Safety Time (ESST) sections. It is also requested to add a section on Wage Disclosure Protections to the handbook. A motion to approve the handbook updates was made by David Nuccio, seconded by Diane Blake. Motion carried.
- b. **Telework Policy Renewal** – The 2022 telework policy was renewed in 2023. Approval was requested to renew the policy for 2024, with a revision requiring that even part-time employees are in the office two days per week. A motion to approve renewing the telework policy was made by Tim Behrends, seconded by David Nuccio. Motion carried.
- c. **2024 Seasonal Staffing** – Approval is requested to hire the 2024 seasonal staff of up to 15 employees. A motion to approve posting and hiring up to 15 seasonal employees was made by Diane Blake, seconded by David Nuccio. Motion carried.
- d. **EMWREP Staffing Request** – Washington Conservation District has hosted the East Metro Water Resource Education Program (EMWREP) since 2006. The current EMWREP budget provides funding for 1.5FTE. More recently, the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership has provided funding for a 0.5FTE watershed education position since 2021. Education and outreach activities for these two programs are led by Angie Hong and Barbara Heitkamp. This spring, Angie and Barbara are requesting board approval to step back to 60% time, and to post for a new full-time education senior technician to support the EMWREP and LSC partnerships. A motion to approve posting for a new full-time education technician in January 2024 and approve Angie and Barbara’s request to move from full-time to part-time (0.6FTE) in March 2024 and April 2024, respectively, was made by David Nuccio, seconded by Tim Behrends. Motion carried.
- e. **FY24 Conservation Partner Legacy Grant Agreements – Afton and Stillwater Twp** – WCD Staff and partners applied for funding through the Conservation Partners Legacy from the Minnesota DNR. The program funds conservation projects that restore, enhance, or protect forests, wetlands, prairies, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife in Minnesota. Funding for the CPL grant program is from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. The WCD was awarded \$19,050 of funding to restore prairie on 1-acre of the Afton Levee. And \$50,000 for restoration work at Little Carnelian Park in Stillwater Township. The next steps are to sign the grant agreement with the DNR and develop and sign a workplan. WCD staff requests board approval for the District Manager to sign both of these documents for both projects. A motion was made by Tim Behrends, seconded by Diane Blake, to approve signing a grant contract and work plan by

District Manager for the FY2024 CPL Grant as outlined. All members voting yes. Motion carried

- f. **FY24 MDA Noxious Weed Grant** – The WCD Staff and partners applied and have been awarded funding for the following project through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture grant program. The next steps are to sign the grant agreement with the MDA and develop and sign a workplan. WCD staff requests board approval for the District Manager to sign both of these documents. A motion was made by Tim Behrends, seconded by Diane Blake, to approve signing a grant contract and work plan by the District Manager for FY2024 MDA, Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Grant as outlined. All members voting yes. Motion carried.
- g. **FY22 BWSR Capacity Encumbrance Request - Griffiths** - WCD staff requests encumbrance of up to \$3,824 from the FY2022 BWSR Capacity cost share grant to install 1.25 acres of conservation cover (prairie) at the Griffiths property (585 Julep Court N in Lake Elmo). This conversion would reduce TP by .34 lbs/yr and TSS by 60.83 T/yr to Goose Lake. This conversion is also located in a vulnerable groundwater area (karst/high pollution sensitivity), removing future land management inputs to protect groundwater. The total project cost estimate is \$7,605. The remaining cost will be shared between Valley Branch Watershed District and the landowner. WCD staff requests approval to enter into the contract for FY2022 BWSR Capacity, Contract #22-02 BWSR Capacity. A motion was made by Tim Behrends to approve an encumbrance of \$3,824 and enter into the contract for FY2022 BWSR Capacity, Contract #22-02 BWSR Capacity. No second to the motion is required. The district technical representative (Elissa Thompson) has performed a site inspection, concept plans, and cost estimate. Applicant will be notified of Board’s decision within 15 days. All members voting yes. Motion carried.
- h. **FY23 BWSR HELP Partial Payment Request –Carpenter Prairie** - WCD encumbered \$4,500 from the FY2023 BWSR HELP Grant to enhance 2.2 acres of prairie. The prairie received a controlled burn in November 2023 and was interseeded with purchased seed in December. WCD staff have determined the project seeding meets the intent and approve of the request for partial payment. WCD staff are requesting partial payment of \$2,880.00 from the FY2023 BWSR HELP grant to Mahtomedi Public Schools Attn: Beth Palmer at 1520 Mahtomedi Ave Mahtomedi, MN 55115. A motion was made by David Nuccio, seconded by Diane Blake, to approve a Partial Payment of \$2,880 for contract BWSR HELP FY23-03 to OH Anderson for the Prairie Enhancement prescribed burn. The district technical representative (Elissa Thompson) has approved partial payment. Applicant will be notified of Board’s decision within 15 days. All members voting yes. Motion carried.
- i. **Washington County Soil Health Practice Implementation – 2022/2023** - Through the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership (LSCWP), the Washington Conservation District (WCD) received \$125,100 to implement soil health practices within the LSC boundary of Washington County:
 - FY21 LSC Watershed Based Implementation Funding (A4, Non-Structural BMPs) - \$60,000
 - FY23 LSC CWF Soil Health Grant - \$65,100

The WCD began implementing practices under these funding sources in fall 2022. The WCD has spent the entire \$125,100 from LSCWP, and implemented \$38,730.50 worth of soil health practices under additional funding sources (WCD grants and local match, not necessarily within the LSC boundary). Over the past two years, soil health practices have been implemented on approximately 2,500 acres county-wide with approximate total practice lifespan reductions of 15,315 lbs TP and 14,060 tons TSS, and approximate soil savings of 32,310 tons. These practices can move fields from year-to-year to follow a producer’s rotation. Practice field locations may change watersheds year-to-year, as some producers operate throughout Washington County.

- j. MN Campaign Finance Reporting** – The Board was reminded to review and certify their statement of economic interest in January 2024.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

None.

Tim Behrends moved to adjourn the public meeting. Diane Blake seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 4:06 p.m. The next scheduled meeting is February 13, 2024 at 3:00p.m.

Secretary

Approved Date