



Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission

MEMO

To: BCWMC Commissioners
From: Laura Jester, Administrator & Karen Chandler, Commission Engineer
Date: February 6, 2018

RE: Follow Up on Commission Direction Questionnaire and Staff Evaluations

At their meeting in December, the Commission reviewed responses from five Commissioners and four TAC members on questions about the Commission's accomplishments and direction and an evaluation of staff. Staff was directed to further consider the responses and bring recommended follow up actions to a future meeting.

We reviewed the responses, paying particular attention to comments on frustrations, strategic priorities, and needed improvements. We noted the consistent themes and more significant comments and compiled the following responses and some recommendations (underlined) for your consideration.

Suggestions for Commission Meetings and Commissioner Focus

Comments:

- *Restructure or reorganize in some way to make it so that the commission isn't presented with decisions that are last-minute 'do it now or lose the chance' deals.*
- *The meetings are too long relative to what is accomplished.*
- *Meetings could go better with a little more commissioner preparation.*
- *Strengthen the basis (in the JPA) for the commissioners to set and manage the agenda and to have their effort appropriately pay off. Commissioners should be compensated.*
- *Commission to continue to develop the expertise and ability of the commissioners to lead the organization and to pursue a resource-improvement agenda developed and managed by the commission with the support of the administrator and staff.*
- *Commissioners should be provided more formal staff reports (as opposed to engineering memos) that summarize background information, budget information, and recommended actions. I think it would assist at meetings where Commissioners have sometimes asked what they are voting on or what staff is asking for.*
- *Meetings need to be kept on track, discussions should to be tabled if a motion is not reached within a reasonable time.*

Responses/Recommendations:

Under agenda item 5D, staff will present some ideas for meeting efficiency. Meetings are sometimes long because this is a very busy organization with inquisitive and engaged Commissioners (this is good!). We believe the Commission accomplishes a lot during meetings. An alternative to long meetings would be Commission workshops, a second Commission meeting every

month, or more committee work. While this could reduce meeting length, it would require additional meetings or workshops – so there is a tradeoff. The Administrative Services Committee could further brainstorm or discuss additional ideas, if warranted.

Staff developed the Commission and committee meeting calendar (see Item 5B) in part to help staff plan ahead and avoid last-minute decisions. However, because the Commission meets only once a month, unforeseen opportunities or issues will likely arise that may require last-minute action by the Commission.

It is important for Commissioners to prepare for meetings to keep discussions streamlined and focused. It is important for staff to provide the appropriate level of information without being overwhelming. We feel we typically provide the appropriate amount of background information, budget impact information and recommended actions for agenda items through the Administrator's Agenda Memo, Engineering memos, and other memos, reports, presentations, links to further information online, etc. The Administrative Services Committee could discuss additional ideas, if needed.

The current Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) expires January 1, 2025. If revisions to the JPA are desired and warranted, discussions about those revisions should start no later than early 2023. All nine member cities must agree to the JPA and all nine mayors must sign it.

Suggestions for Capital Improvement Program

Comments:

- *Continued struggle to pursue a clear resource protection-driven agenda that fulfills goals and policies to protect and improve resources that is managed and overseen by the commission*
- *Determining what projects represent the best use of our limited funds.*
- *High and growing costs of maintaining and dredging water quality ponds on the mainstem and branches. Will this be our only budgetary line item in the future?*
- *Consideration could be given to cost sharing on capital improvements in order to partner on more projects.*
- *Feasibility studies for the same type of project tend come in 25-33% higher when completed through the Commission when compared to a request for proposal process.*
- *Believe there needs to be a renewed focus on the management of flooding*
- *Create more joint ventures such as with Agora will be key to improving water quality*

Responses/Recommendations:

The new CIP Prioritization Committee will focus on developing a prioritization process for placing projects on the CIP and should complete its work in the first half of this year. The new prioritization process should take multiple factors into consideration and will help target the best project in the best location at the best time. Information such as subwatershed assessments, impaired resources, flood-prone areas, project opportunity and funding partners (including cost sharing with cities) should all be considered as factors in a prioritization process. The process will be used beginning with development of the 2021 – 2025 CIP early in 2019.

Maintenance of CIP projects, including dredging stormwater ponds, should be discussed with the TAC and considered in the conversations about CIP prioritization. For very large dredging projects, the CIP “gatekeeper” questions allow for pond dredging along the Bassett Creek Trunk System in certain circumstances.

In the last few years, the Commission has opted to have the Commission Engineer develop feasibility studies for Commission projects. This is because the Engineer knows the goals, policies, vision, resources, and partnerships of the watershed better than other firms. However, “developing feasibility studies” was not included in a list of tasks to be completed by the Commission Engineer in a [policy 3.7](#) adopted in December 2016. The Administrative Services Committee or Commission could discuss this issue, if warranted.

We recommend that the Commission and/or TAC develop a process to identify and pursue opportunities for public-private partnerships to install best practices. Further, we recommend that the Commission develop a way to fund projects that go above and beyond requirements and which provide a high value (best project in the best location for the least cost). Exploring this area could be wrapped into the CIP Prioritization Committee’s work or could be a separate track.

Suggestions on Technical Areas

Comments & Responses:

- *What can we do about salt!?* (multiple comments on salt)
 - Chloride pollution is a significant threat to the lakes, streams, and rivers. At their March meeting the TAC will review model ordinances developed by the Freshwater Society for cities to work on this issue. Further, staff was directed to bring ideas for how/when/if the Commission should support limited liability legislation to future meetings. Since traditional CIP projects and BMPs do little to abate chloride use and pollution, we recommend the Commission or CIP Prioritization Committee consider how/if to fund, cost share, or partner on activities such as equipment purchases and retrofits and other chloride-reducing practices.
- *The relaxation of the MIDS trigger points for impervious increases in linear development projects went too far.*
 - At their June 2018 meeting, the Commission will review new data compiled by the Commission Engineer regarding requirements for linear projects as directed at the June 2017 meeting. Further discussions about the revised requirements may be warranted after the data are presented.
- *P8 model limitations are disappointing*
 - P8 is a moderately complex model that is capable of simulating urban runoff pollutant buildup/washoff and treatment by BMPs that are designed for filtration and/or ideal settling conditions. The P8 model has limitations, which means we must pay special attention to how and when we use it to estimate the water quality effects of certain BMPs. The limitations of the model for evaluating treatment effectiveness become a greater concern as the existing or proposed BMP characteristics deviate from design criteria that were established to ensure ideal settling (or filtration) conditions. Examples of limitations that lead to P8 overestimating treatment effectiveness include situations where 1) ponds or other

BMPs are subject to scour/resuspension; 2) ponds or other BMPs do not have adequate storage volume for settled sediment; 3) short-circuiting (i.e., pond inlets and outlets too close together); and 4) sediment phosphorus release. An example that could lead to P8 underestimating treatment effectiveness include situations where biological uptake or chemical transformation is greater than the pollutant removal that would ordinarily occur from settling or filtration. The Commission Engineer recognizes these model limitations and will continue to develop approaches to work around these limitations to ensure that we do not bias our project recommendations and prioritization. We worked around the P8 model limitations for the existing Winnetka Pond conditions; we used separate scour/resuspension calculations to determine that the pond did not meet its design criteria given its current bottom contours and watershed flow conditions. The Commission Engineer is also working to calibrate the P8 model for the Northwood Lake watershed, using Three Rivers Park District monitoring data.

Even with its limitations, the Commission Engineer recommends the Commission continue to use the P8 model, as it is currently the best tool available. Also, we used the P8 model results to provide the following useful information: 1) pond prioritization information, which may lead to the surveying and re-prioritization of ponds for dredging; and 2) maps showing pollutant loading “hot spots” where BMPS should be implemented.

- *Needs to be an emphasis placed on the complexities of climate change and its impacts to our watershed*
 - In the next year or two (it’s not budgeted for 2018), we hope to use the XP-SWMM model to discover flood-prone areas and facilities and to map vulnerabilities to various infrastructure within each member city. We then plan to convene meetings by city with Commissioners, city staff, city council members, and others to understand the information and make a plan for building resiliency. These “climate adaptation workshops” have been implemented in other watersheds in our area.

- *Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are a priority*
 - With the work of the APM/AIS Committee complete and the AIS Rapid Response Plan developed, the Commission is well-poised to fill service gaps and carry out specific tasks related to AIS. The Commission could decide to maintain an APM/AIS Committee in the event more issues or possible tasks arise or more review and input is needed in this area.