

Equity in Watershed Management Workshop

Learning and Discussion Notes

April 25, 2022 ~ 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Crystal Community Center

Welcome and Introductions

About 35 people attended the workshop including people from Shingle Creek WMC, Bassett Creek WMC (7 commissioners/alternates; 7 TAC members; 3 staff), Hennepin County, MN Board of Water and Soil Resources, Nine Mile Creek Watershed District

Hennepin County Commissioner Irene Fernando kicked off the event and asked participants to get out of their comfort zones; connect in ways that aren't typical

Vulnerable Communities and Environmental Justice: Locations and Definitions

Karen Galles, Land & Water Supervisor

Hennepin County Environment and Energy

- County is working on land and water issues through equity lens
- Mapping of environmental justice areas – several datasets available
- Emphasized importance of “full and fair” participation in decision making
- Mitigate disproportionality and share equal benefits with all communities
- Demonstrated differences in individual resiliency to environmental damage (such as a flooding event) – ranging from an inconvenience for some, to a manageable problem for others, to a catastrophic event for those without resources or means to address
- Could prioritize work and projects to help those for whom event would be catastrophic
- Improving and protecting natural resources and investing in equity are not mutually exclusive activities

Reflecting on Personal and Professional Experiences with Environmental Injustice

Kristel Porter, Executive Director

Minnesota Renewable Now

- Statewide, 6% of the population live near pollution; in communities of color, 20% live near pollution
- Populations at risk for impacts from air pollution: statewide = 32%; low income = 46%; communities of color = 91%
- Urban areas are often “concrete jungles” with few green spaces
- Relayed a story of seeing a consistent blue haze in the air above the Mississippi River from the metal processing plant nearby
- Relayed the difference in the air temperature driving through the city and then into Wirth Park and Golden Valley

Small Group Discussion

What stood out for you with the information you've heard so far? Did anything surprise you? What are you still curious about?

Some responses:

- High percentage of Shingle Creek Watershed identified as vulnerable.
- Differences and similarities between public health and water quality. Statistics on respiratory disparities by demographic. Industrial impact on air quality. Links between health and environment. Use of data to identify connections and visualization.
- No Mississippi River access in North Minneapolis, data is so striking, differences between North Minneapolis and other areas. Data set that tells us about who lacks access and "enjoyment" opportunities. Prevalence of nebulizers at child's daycare.
- Available data, use of GIS for analysis.
- First person experiences help explain inequalities, watersheds can help address air quality.

Environmental Healing in Relationship with Community

Laura Scholl, Associate Director and Director of Development at Metro Blooms

Erika Schlaeger dos Santos, Director of Community Relations at Metro Blooms

- Advocate for decisions made in partnership with communities; "nothing about us without us"
- Relationships and trust take time to establish and evolve; one-to-one conversation and outreach is best
- Authentic, meaningful outreach takes time (example of canvassing a neighborhood and taking 30 minutes per household to discuss raingardens)
- Renters are an important group to remember; they are often left out of conversations and decision making
- Prioritize input from communities when planning and implementing
- Come to situations ready to learn

Small Group Discussion

If your organization were to write an equity statement or develop goals to help improve environmental equity, what are some key words or phrases that would be important to include?

Access	Paired outcomes	Relationship
Right to water	Cross-generational/age	Vulnerable
Clean drinking water	Participatory	Health
Availability of water	Person-centered	Coordination
Health	Empathy	Support
Equitable/equality/equity	Gratitude	Community
Inclusive/inclusion	Translate	Touchpoint
Collaborate	Communication	Future
Indigenous land acknowledgement	Outreach	Background
Developed with public	Commitment	Science
Take time to establish trust	Meet needs	Encouragement

Safety	Resiliency	Acknowledge privilege and biases
History	Quality	Investigate impacts
Refocus	Data	Undo harm
Many small projects	Awareness	Environmental justice
Prioritization on community	Be a neighbor to everyone	Reduce disparities
Opportunity	Reach out	Long-lasting/durable
Partnership	Advocate	Evolving
Curiosity	BIPOC	Adaptive
Education	Support	Decision-making
Flexibility	Ask then listen	Human
Connectivity	Learn	Non-transactional
Engagement/authentic engagement	Comprehensive	People centered
Easy communication	Increase diversity	

Moving Toward Equity in Watershed Management

Abby Moore, Training and Community Learning Specialist
Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization

The MWMO is:

- Increasing engagement and working to build trust and resiliency in underserved communities
- Tailoring outreach to specific communities and taking time with small groups
- Working to be responsive to actual community needs
- Incorporating workforce development and training for green jobs
- Incorporating Restorative Development principles

Discussions by Watershed

BCWMC Commissioners' Comments:

- Review all projects with an equity lens
- Help address air quality with more plantings
- Have an honest discussion about priorities and how equity fits into BCWMC work
- Continue the discussion of equity throughout planning process

Adjourn