



**MINNEHAHA CREEK**  **WATERSHED DISTRICT**  
QUALITY OF WATER QUALITY OF LIFE

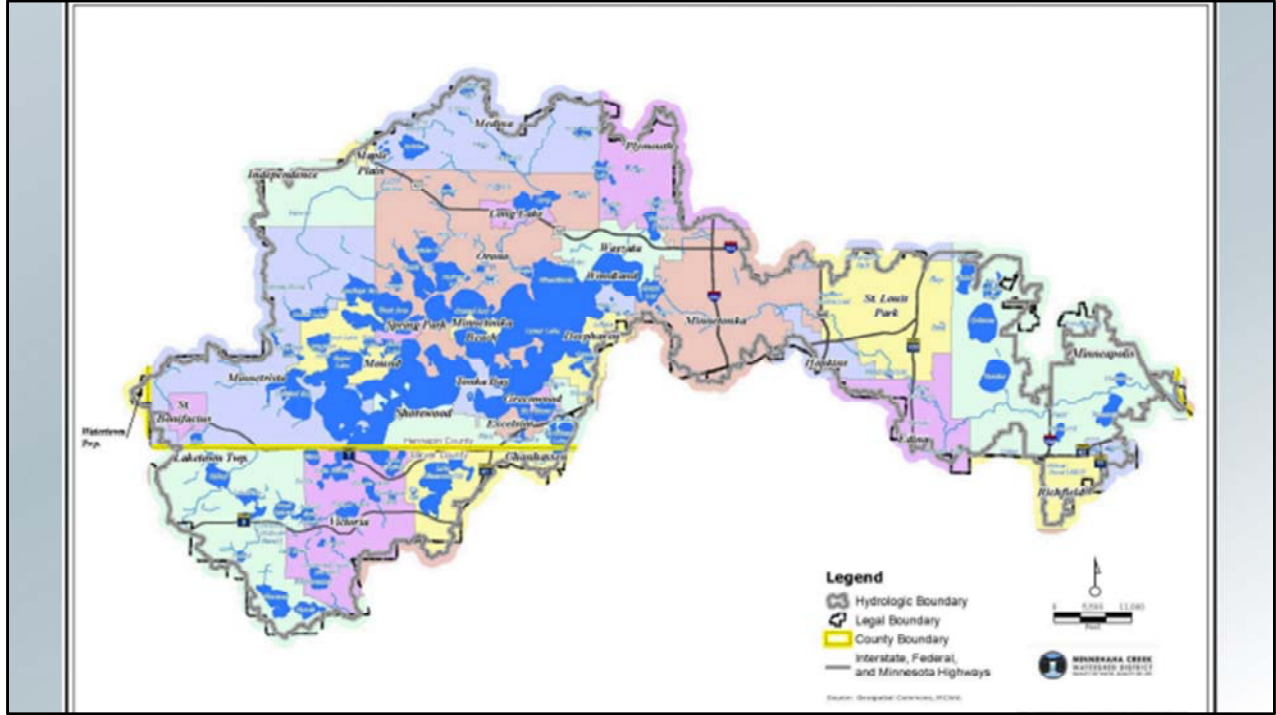
## **MCWD Approach to Prioritization and Partnership**

Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission

June 7, 2018

## Outline

- Background and evolution of District's approach
  - Challenges of 2007 CIP
  - Partnership examples and lessons learned in Minnehaha Creek Greenway
- Formalizing new approach in Watershed Management Plan
  - Prioritization and focus
  - Integration and partnership with land use planning



MCWD borders Bassett Creek watershed (some of the same cities – Plymouth, Minnetonka, Golden Valley, SLP, Minneapolis)

We cover 178 sq mi, 29 communities, 129 lakes, 30+ impaired waters

## Background

- Challenges of implementing the 2007 Plan and CIP:
  - Unfocused
  - Lack of alignment with land use plans
  - Overly prescriptive
  - Regulatory tone
- Results:
  - Projects cancelled
  - Lack of significant, measurable improvement
  - Conflict with cities
  - Missed opportunities



Some context about how our current approach evolved. We were experiencing challenges as we got a few years into implementing our 2007 CIP.

Unfocused – 17 goals, ½ page mission statement, scattershot CIP (tried to address all issues and please all parties)

Lack of coordination/alignment with cities – developed model to determine load reduction needs and project locations, developed projects in isolation, out of sync with land use plans

Overly prescriptive – didn't allow for response to opportunities (w/o plan amendment)

Regulatory tone – emphasis on rules and load reduction req's, rather than partnership

Results - projects kept stalling out (not feasible, not cost-effective, lack of support, city conflict), no accumulated benefit

Set out to address these issues with our new Plan

# Minnehaha Greenway



New approach started to evolve in Minnehaha Greenway

Heavily urbanized section of Minnehaha Creek in Hopkins and SLP (wetlands filled, creek straightened, impervious cover), highest pollutant loading per unit area to Hiawatha, creek and lake impairments

None of this work was master planned, but happened organically as specific land-use opportunities arose



# Methodist Hospital



- Started with Methodist Hospital

# Methodist Hospital



- In 2009 Methodist Hospital approached the District with a proposed heart and vascular center looking for permits
- The hospital has a history of flooding and so the creek was generally viewed as a liability
- However, by understanding the hospital's goals the District was able to pivot away from a regulatory paradigm towards a partnership concept to reorient the entire campus around a restored Minnehaha Creek as a healing environment.

## Methodist Hospital



- Hospital leadership came to support the idea because of medical literature acknowledging the quantifiable healing value of nature which has been shown to reduced patient stays, reduce need for pain drugs and generally improve patient outcomes.
- As a result of the partnership the District accomplished stormwater improvements for the campus and restored the channel in way it can more frequently interact with its floodplain.
- This project has come to be viewed by Park Nicollet leadership as a point of distinction for them in the healthcare market place, helping them meet the hospital's healthcare goals
- The hospital ultimately contributed \$600,000 in boardwalk and trails for patients, visitors and staff.
- The project also became the first major green infrastructure initiative in an area starved of openspace.
- This success provided a platform to catalyze a vision for upstream



# Minnehaha Preserve



- Next - Minnehaha Preserve

# Minnehaha Preserve



- Approached by SLP about installing riprap along creek. Using Methodist as an example, pushed for a larger remainder and restoration.
- At the time we began thinking about this project, the Metropolitan Council was starting to plan a third light rail transit line for the Twin Cities, SW LRT, which will run through this corridor.
- The District recognized this as a significant opportunity to advance its stream restoration initiatives and so it began to focus on understanding the goals and needs for pedestrian connectivity, equitable housing issues, future development plans, utility investment and transportation infrastructure.
- Developed a project concept that was previously unwanted on City Land by orienting around light rail transit and marketed the project around connecting employment, housing, transit and open space.

## Minnehaha Preserve



- The project treated over 80 acres of regional stormwater, meandered 4,000 feet of channel, improved habitat through pools, riffles, bank treatment, restored wetlands and connected the stream with its historic floodplain for the first time since it was ditched.
- However, the reason the project became viable was the need for enhanced community connections and the amenity and offset regulatory value the project created for future planned development around Light rail transit.
- By regionalizing stormwater, in a complicated constrained and contaminated area, future development can be streamlined for approval, and maximize real estate value by reducing land encumbrances, thereby catalyzing private investment in the community.

## Minnehaha Preserve



- The project essentially became about the economic value created by the green infrastructure.
- The community saw value in mobilized 600 affordable housing units within 5 minute walkshed of mass transit and regional employers liked being connected to housing



## Minnehaha Preserve



- The project brought hundreds of homes within walking distance of a 39 acre greenway, which made the rail project score more appealing for federal new starts funds
- Since being installed the site has become an attraction for community events, and programming for school districts and the University of Minnesota who use the project as an outdoor classroom.



## Minnehaha Preserve



- Because of these non-water benefits, not only was the project made viable,
- MCWD received over 30 acres of free land from private landowners and the City of St. Louis Park
- And \$750,000 from the state for investment in green infrastructure.

# Cottageville Park



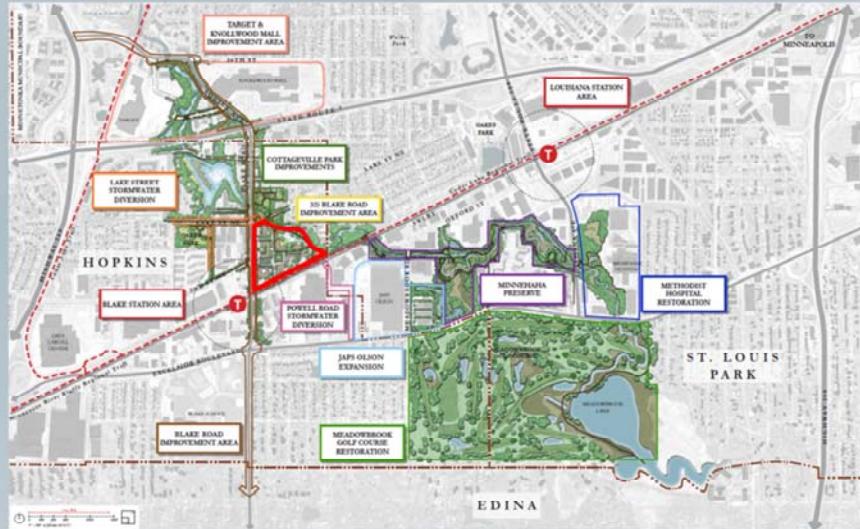
- Next is Cottageville Park

## Cottageville Park



- Cottageville Park is located in Hopkins who reached out to MCWD after conducting a small area plan wondering if the District would help with urban land acquisition.
- The City's goals were to address the number one crime response spot in the city which was due to a park with alley access and no visibility from the street. **(CLICK)**
- MCWD looked at the opportunities to daylight and provide access to the Creek while managing over 30 acres of regional stormwater and decided to acquire 24 unit apts, 3 single family homes and a commercial property **(CLICK)**
- A collaborative plan to provide an expanded 5 acre park with community garden, playground, pavilion and passive use area next to the creek was developed receiving \$3 million from the City and \$500k from the state for the work following MCWD's acquisitions. **(CLICK)**
- This was finished Fall of 2015 and people have been flocking to the area to use the new amenity. In addition a 51 unit affordable housing development was constructed on the north side of the park by a non-profit development firm called Project for Pride in Living. This project replaced all housing lost during the acquisition and is capitalizing on the amenity value and regional stormwater put in place in the park.

## 325 Blake Road (Cold Storage)



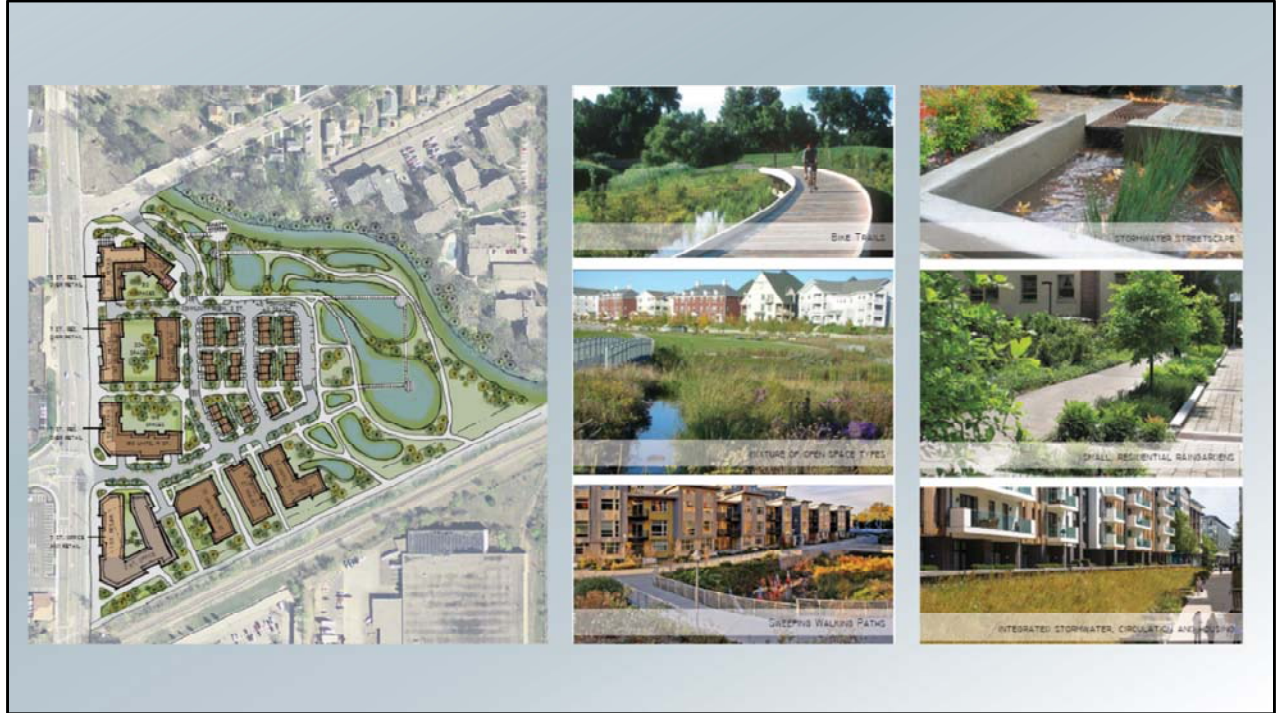
- Immediately adjacent to Cottageville Park is 325 Blake Road – Hopkins Cold Storage





- 325 Blake Road is a 17 acre industrial freezer and was identified in the City's small area plan as having extremely high redevelopment potential and being a barrier to future private investment in the corridor.
- It is one of the largest sites on planned SWLRT and has over 1000 feet of creek frontage, 1000 feet of frontage on the Cedar Regional Trail, and 1000 feet on County Road 5/Blake Road.
- In the District's analysis this site became viewed as a cornerstone vital to link upstream and downstream work.
- Recognizing over 260 acres of untreated regional water from 3 cities discharging around the property, the District acquired the property in 2011. ([CLICK](#))
- The District maintained leases to cash flow the business through 2017.
- We began decommissioning the facility in January of 2018 and recently completed our RFQ process for selecting a master developer for the site





- The District plans to reroute all 260 acres of water into this site. The first stormwater diversion was constructed through 3 private properties and under freight rail during the winter of 2015
- The second pipe diversion is in active construction right now, being installed in partnership with the Met Council as they construct a new sanitary sewer force main through the area.
- This water will be slowly infiltrated in the corridor positively influencing baseflow.
- The rest of the site will be positioned for a mixed use development adjacent to the SWLRT station, leaving 4 acres for stormwater and greenway connection.
- This project represents the District's most assertive role in urban land planning and community development to date.

# Japs-Olson Company



- The regionalization of stormwater on the 325 Blake Road site has immediately opened up new development partnerships in the area with a company called Japs Olson.

## Japs-Olson Company



- Japs Olson owns 30 acres of land and operates a large nationally competitive printing business that employs about 600 people.
- Japs Olson was looking to expand its business to a 500,000 square foot operation, replacing parking on an adjacent property it purchase.
- The District entered a partnership with Japs Olson as a value added consultant.
- The District facilitated environmental contamination planning that would come into play during redevelopment, and completed a stormwater assessment to assist in engineering design for the site.
- It became obvious it would be technically infeasible to treat all the water on site, so MCWD offered its regional facility in trade for the business treating regional drainage and gifting MCWD 3.7 acres of land to be reclaimed to the corridor.
- To make this happen MCWD had to negotiate the acquisition of additional property on behalf of the owner, and facilitated municipal annexation to change city boundaries which had previously bisected the property

## Japs-Olson Company



The additional 3.7 acres of reclaimed greenspace will treat more regional water than required by regulation, and will serve as another pedestrian gateway to the Greenway.



## Japs-Olson Company (before and after)



Here is a before and after picture of the site this fall before construction which was all handled by the private business owner.



## Lessons Learned

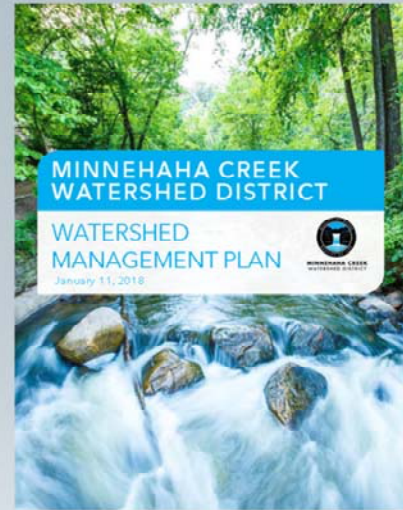
- Keys to our success:
  - Partnership
  - Focus
  - Flexibility
- Adopted new guiding policy in 2014:
  - *In Pursuit of a Balanced Urban Ecology*



- Again, none of this work was master planned, but happened organically as specific land-use opportunities arose.
- In 2014, District Board adopted BUE policy based on lessons learned through successes in Minnehaha Greenway. BUE policy calls for integration of water resource and land use planning, recognizing the potential for providing greater public benefit and efficient use of public funds when plans and investments are coordinated and aligned.
- Guiding principles:
  - Partnership – need to partner with land use community to protect and improve water resources; do this by understanding partner’s goals and challenges and position our projects to meet them
  - Focus – more effective when we prioritize and focus; develop better understanding of system needs and opportunities, build relationships and momentum, aggregate benefit for significant, measurable improvement
  - Flexibility – creativity, innovation, able to respond to opportunities

## Goals for the 2017 Plan

- Position District as partner rather than regulator
- Promote integration and early coordination with land use planning
- Establish clear priorities for improved focus and effectiveness
- Provide flexibility to respond to opportunities and new information
- Realistic and transparent



- Position District as partner rather than regulator
- Promote integration/early coordination with land use planning
- Establish clear priorities for improved focus and effectiveness (based on sound science)
- Provide flexibility to respond to opportunities and new information
- Realistic and transparent – District has limited staff and \$ resources, Plan attempts to set realistic expectations for what can be implemented in 10 years (can't fix everything), transparent about how we're prioritizing

## Organizational Strategy

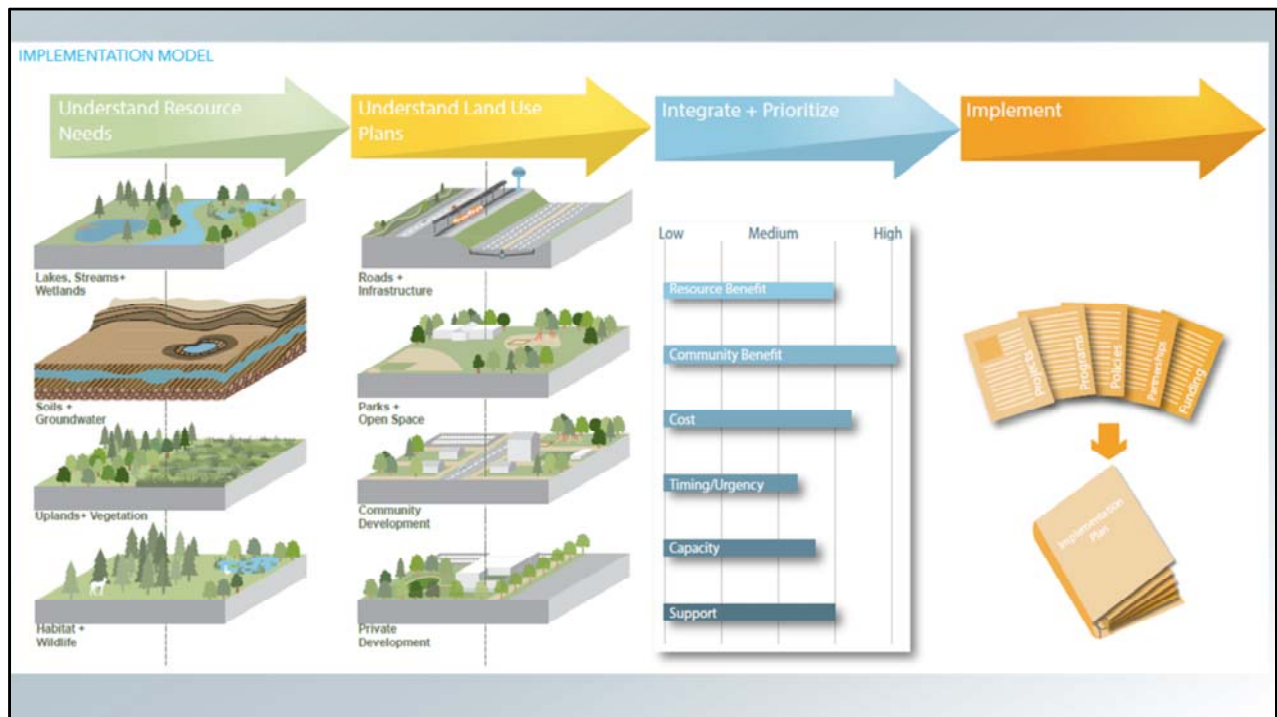
Vision: A landscape of vibrant communities where the natural and built environments in balance create value and enjoyment.

Mission: We collaborate with public and private partners to protect and improve land and water for current and future generations.

Goals: Water Quality, Water Quantity, Ecological Integrity, Thriving Communities

Updated our mission, vision and goals in early 2016:

- Reflect new approach - Emphasize themes of partnership, integration, and doing work in ways that add broader community benefit
- Improve focus and clarity – old mission statement and 17 goals



#### Implementation model – 4 steps:

- Understand resource needs – sound science to inform management (understanding issues and drivers)
- Understand land use (plans, goals, and opportunities)– coordination with communities
- Integrate and prioritize – based on resource need and opportunity
- Implement – balance of focus on priorities and flexibility to respond to opportunities District-wide



## Prioritization and Focus

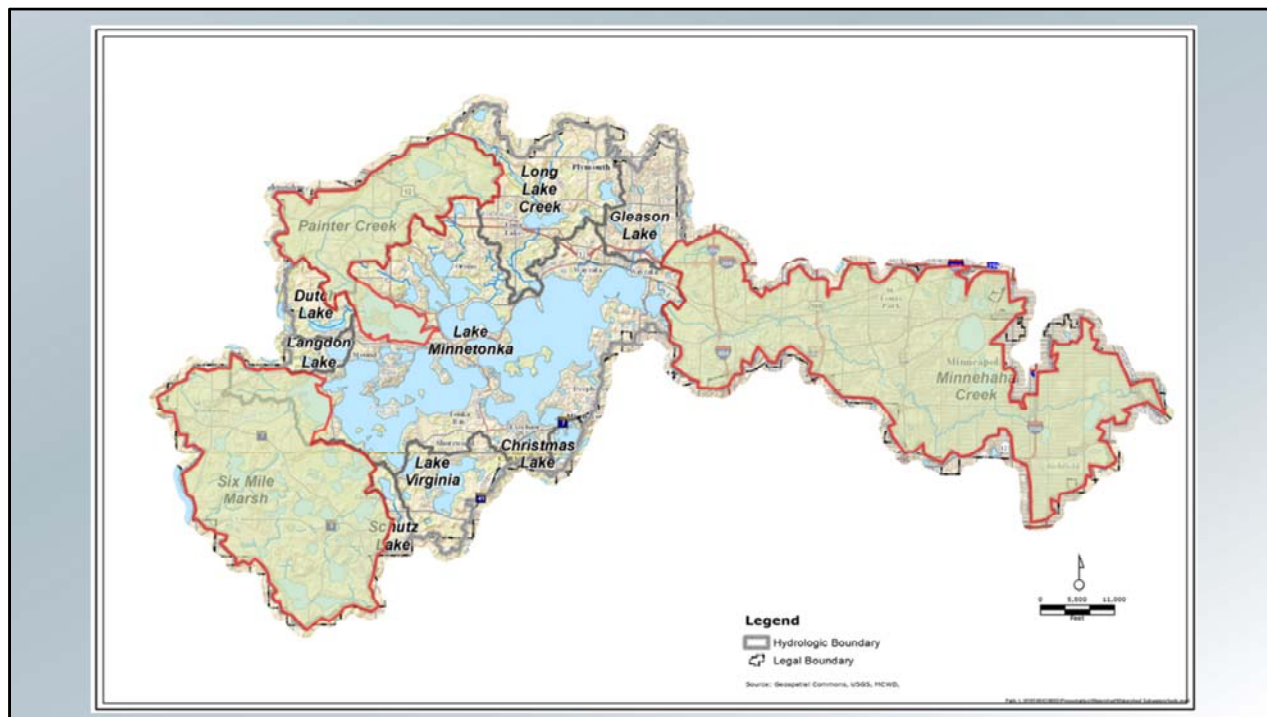
- Considerations for focal areas:
  - Water resource issues/impairments
  - Public value of resources
  - Probability of achieving measurable resource improvement
  - Local partnerships and support
  - Known project opportunities
  - Funding opportunities



We prioritize at both the watershed and subwatershed scale

At the watershed scale, we select focal areas where we will take lead to bring together partners to develop and implement comprehensive plan to achieve significant, measurable benefit

Qualitative rather than quantitative criteria



### 3 priority subwatersheds selected for 2017 plan cycle

- Minnehaha Creek – regional resources (creek and Minneapolis chain of lakes), multiple creek and lake impairments; land use change/opportunities around SW LRT, Arden Park, flood damage and FEMA funding in Minneapolis; willing partners
- Six Mile – 27 square miles tributary to highest polluted waterbody on Minnetonka (Halsted Bay), multiple impairments throughout system. Heavy development pressure and opportunity to get out ahead of it. Regional partnership.
- Painter – Second highest polluted waterbody in MCWD. Section 206 feasibility study completed with USACE, opportunity to receive federal funding. Longer-range priority.

Applying new model in Six Mile – more planned/intentional; ran process with member cities, counties, TRPD to align goals, plans, investments, build relationships and support; now have comprehensive, long-range, and well supported plan and are well positioned to pursue funding state/federal (LSOHF, USACE partnership, BWSR, MPCA).

## Flexibility and Responsiveness

- Established priorities for each subwatershed based on issues → drivers → strategies
- Developing program to promote early coordination
- Responsive tools:
  - Opportunity-driven stormwater management projects
  - Competitive grants
  - Program services (technical assistance, permitting assistance, education/outreach)

Outside of these focal areas, District is working to promote early coordination and information sharing with cities and developers so we can respond to needs and opportunities.

CIP includes project descriptions and funding for opportunity-driven projects as well as a responsive grant program.

Will be developing project priority list to track city/agency CIPs and help us predict and prioritize.

## Flexibility and Responsiveness

- Prioritization criteria:
  - Resource needs
  - Resource benefit – quality, quantity, ecological
  - Community benefits
  - Cost
  - Timing/urgency
  - Capacity
  - Support



Will be developing more quantitative ranking criteria for evaluating external projects





**MINNEHAHA CREEK**  **WATERSHED DISTRICT**  
QUALITY OF WATER QUALITY OF LIFE

**Thank you!**

Questions?