

Thrive MSP 2040 Policy Discussion Outline

Water Policy Issues

Introduction

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) performs multiple roles related to water in the Twin Cities region:

- Providing wastewater collection and treatment services to over 2.7 million people in 107 communities (over 90 percent of our region's residents);
- Overseeing water supply planning in 105 communities; and
- Serving as the area-wide water quality planning agency under Section 208 of the federal Clean Water Act.

Water resources management is a vital tool for preserving and enhancing the region's economic competitiveness and quality of life. Decisions about water supply, surface water management, wastewater collection and treatment, transportation, housing, natural resources, and other land uses cannot be made in isolation from one another. Regional transportation and wastewater systems investments and services help shape growth patterns; housing locations and types affect mobility options and travel patterns; unplanned growth can put a strain on natural areas, groundwater availability and quality and other resources. Maximizing the benefits of wastewater, water supply and storm water infrastructure plays a key role in supporting the competitive position of the region.

Past and current water policy looks at wastewater, water supply and surface water management as three separate policy, planning and management areas; water is managed in a linear fashion.

Today's challenges require that wastewater, water supply and surface water be managed in a more integrated manner, to ensure availability of water resources for current and future generations. This new approach is called sustainable water resources management.



Under sustainable water resources management, new relationships can increase the efficiency and benefits of our water use. For example, treated wastewater effluent can be re-used for non-potable uses such as watering, thus reducing demands on water supply. And promoting infiltration from impervious surfaces can help to recharge our aquifers.

Existing policy direction

The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) has three goals that are addressed further in the [Water Resources Management Policy Plan](#) (WRMPP):

- Working collaboratively with regional partners to accommodate growth within the metropolitan area;
- Maximizing the effectiveness and value of regional services, infrastructure investments and incentives;
- Preserving vital natural areas and resources for future generations.

The Framework also has two policies that further define direction for the WRMPP:

- Work with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected and efficient manner;
- Work with local and regional partners to reclaim, conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources.

Finally, the Framework has two environmental [regional benchmarks](#) that the Council measures success in meeting:

- The water quality leaving the metro areas is as good as the water quality entering the metro area;
- The metro area's water resources are adequate to supply future water demands without adverse impacts.

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Issues for discussion

Sustainable water resources management means managing our resources in a way that ensures availability of our water resources for current and future generations, providing for future economic growth while ensuring quality of life for the citizens of the region. High quality ground and surface water resources are needed to support the region's growing water supply needs and the region's unique and intricate ecosystems. *Should Thrive explicitly include an overall water sustainability goal and policy that integrates our water supply, surface and storm water, and wastewater planning and management authorities and system requirements with our regional growth and development strategy? Options:*

- Explicitly adopt a regional water sustainability approach in Thrive MSP 2040 and in the Water Resources Policy Plan.
- Adopt water sustainability approaches in Thrive MSP 2040 and in planning and operations throughout the Council.
- Work with partners outside the Council to promote and adopt a regional water sustainability approach.
- Make no changes to the current approach.

Currently 70 percent of our population gets their water supply from groundwater and roughly 30 percent gets their water supply from surface water resources. Our aquifers and surface waters are suffering as a result of increased groundwater withdrawals and less recharge. *What policies should the Council adopt in Thrive to respond to this growing water supply issue? Options:*

- Provide assistance to communities and review comprehensive plans for conformance with the regional Master Water Supply Plan.
- Use water supply information to inform development of Thrive and other policy and system plans, including geographic planning area strategies.
- Continue convening and working with partners to solve problems that affect regional water supply.
- Make no changes to the current approach.

We have reached a point in our development when we are beginning to see pressures on our water (lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater) resources from the development patterns and practices of the past. *What surface water management and planning policies should the Council adopt in Thrive to better protect our water resources? Options:*

- Institute a watershed-based approach that integrates surface water, water supply and wastewater issues to protect the beneficial uses of the region's water resources.
- Increase convening and working with partners on regional surface water issues.
- Make no changes to the current approach.

The wastewater system has evolved over time and historically has been used to guide where growth and development occurs through the provision of sewer service. At this point in time, however, Council staff believes that the regional wastewater system to serve forecasted household growth through 2040 has been essentially built. *What wastewater planning policies should the Council adopt in Thrive to reflect this new reality? Options:*

- Increase the expectations of development within the existing sewered area to utilize regional infrastructure investments more economically.
- Continue to preserve areas within the long-term wastewater service area for future economical sewered development.
- Continue to manage areas outside the long-term wastewater service area to preserve agricultural uses and significant natural resources, and allow limited unsewered development.
- Strengthen strategies to maintain lower densities prior to service in future development areas.
- Make no changes to the current approach.