

## Minutes of the

### REGULAR MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

#### Committee Members Present:

Peter Lindstrom, Chair; Wendy Wulff, Vice Chair; Kris Fredson; Phillip Sterner; Susan Vento; Raymond Zeran

#### Committee Members Absent:

None

#### CALL TO ORDER

Governor Walz notice was read at the beginning of the meeting.

NOTICE: Governor Walz has declared a peacetime emergency (Emergency Executive Order 20-01) in response to COVID-19 and the Metropolitan Council Chair has determined it is not practical or prudent to conduct an in-person Environment Committee meeting for reasons stated in the Governor's Emergency Executive Order. Accordingly, Environment Committee members will participate in this meeting via telephone or other electronic means and the Environment Committee meeting will be conducted under Minnesota Statutes section 13D.021 at the date and time stated above. This [meeting will be streamed live and recorded](#). We encourage you to monitor the meeting remotely.

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Lindstrom called the regular meeting of the Council's Environment Committee to order at 4:03 p.m. on Tuesday, February 9, 2021 with the following roll call:

Aye: 6 Lindstrom, Fredson, Vento, Sterner, Wulff, Zeran  
Nay: 0  
Absent: 0

#### APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Without objection agenda was approved.

It was moved by Wulff seconded by Sterner to approve the minutes of the January 26, 2021, regular meeting of the Environment Committee.

Aye: 6 Lindstrom, Fredson, Vento, Sterner, Wulff, Zeran  
Nay: 0  
Absent: 0

Motion carried.

#### CONSENT BUSINESS

There were no items on the consent agenda for this meeting.

#### NON-CONSENT BUSINESS

- 2021-43: 2020 Municipal Inflow and Infiltration (I/I) Grant Program

It was moved by Wulff, seconded by Sterner that the Metropolitan Council approves the Inflow and Infiltration (I/I) grant program guidelines and authorizes the Regional Administrator to award and execute grants and grant agreements pursuant to the guidelines outlined in Attachment A of the business item.

Aye: 6 Lindstrom, Fredson, Vento, Sterner, Wulff, Zeran  
Nay: 0  
Absent: 0

Motion carried.

2. 2021-44: Adopt Facility Plan for the Fridley Lift Station L32A Project, MCES Project No. 809400

It was moved by Vento, seconded by Zeran that the Metropolitan Council adopt the Facility Plan for Fridley Lift Station L32A Project, MCES Project No. 809400 per Resolution No. 2021-5 attached to the business item.

Aye: 6 Lindstrom, Fredson, Vento, Sterner, Wulff, Zeran  
Nay: 0  
Absent: 0

Motion carried.

3. 2021-45: Ratification of Emergency Declaration #69 for Environmental Services Disinfection Chemicals Supply

It was moved by Wulff, seconded by Sterner that the Metropolitan Council ratify Emergency Declaration #69 attached to the business item and authorize the Regional Administrator to negotiate and execute a purchase order for disinfection chemicals supply.

Aye: 6 Lindstrom, Fredson, Vento, Sterner, Wulff, Zeran  
Nay: 0  
Absent: 0

Motion carried.

## INFORMATION

1. Update on MCES Wastewater Covid-19 Monitoring:

Staff provided an overview of MCES research on wastewater monitoring to track COVID-19 prevalence in the community. MCES has developed in-house capabilities for isolating genetic material (RNA) from the virus causing COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) in the influent of the Metropolitan Plant and has contracted with the University of Minnesota Genomic Center (UMGC) for analysis of these samples. Our data show that viral RNA concentrations in Metro Plant influent track the clinical case trends for the region, indicating that wastewater monitoring can provide potentially useful information toward understanding and responding to the pandemic. MCES is also providing influent wastewater samples to state- and national- level projects studying and developing this idea. In addition, MCES is working with UMGc staff to use our wastewater samples to identify and monitor the presence of new strains of the virus in the Metro Plant service area.

### Comments/Questions:

Chair Lindstrom inquired if this data has been actionable here or around the nation. Staff stated most of the actionable activity has been with localized sampling at universities or health systems.

Chair Lindstrom stated it may be helpful to know if we have data that we were able to take specific action in the community.

Committee Member Fredson shared another example of how the Council is working with other agencies across the state as well as the region. Are we also looking for new variants of concern? Staff stated our daily monitoring is looking for all COVID-19 strains. We are working with the Genomics Center to develop methods to determine the presence and prevalence of new variants in wastewater.

Committee Member Zeran stated he finds this information fascinating. How long does it take from sample to completed test? Is there indication of how much lead time it will give us? Staff stated the general feeling and results of the community working on this is, wastewater in many cases has been shown to be a leading indicator. We are in the process of obtaining better data on positive cases within the sewered service area in order to better refine the scope of our analysis. We receive daily wastewater samples. The RNA sample is prepared fairly quickly, within one hour. We deliver samples to the University of Minnesota on a weekly basis for analysis. The results are turned around in 2 days.

## 2. Priority Waters Project:

Staff presented an information item about the Priority Waters project, which is an internal Council staff effort to prioritize the region's lakes, rivers, and streams. Given the large number of surface waters in the region, it is not feasible for the Council and its partners to focus planning efforts on all waters equally or to effectively monitor and evaluate all waters regularly. The Priority Waters List will be used by Council staff to direct our resources to waters of highest value to the region. Staff have decided to define "highest value" waters as those that provide the greatest uses and benefits. The project is about 60% complete.

Council staff would like to ensure the priorities and method selected for this project reflect the values and voice of the Environment Committee and residents of the 7-county metro. The presentation is an opportunity to inform committee members about the project, but also for staff to receive feedback on whether the project approach is supported by the Committee and asked questions such as what Committee Members most value about individual lakes, rivers, and streams that they feel a personal connection to as well as what their constituents value most about area lakes, rivers and streams.

### Comments/Questions:

Chair Lindstrom asked what happens if a lake is added to the priority list. What is the impact of this assignment? Staff stated it depends on why it is on the list as well as the score.

Committee Member Vento requested examples of partners. Staff stated there are a number of partners in water resources. Some examples include Watershed outlet monitoring program (WOMP) for stream monitoring, Citizen Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP) for lake monitoring. For CAMP we work with a number of cities who recruit citizen volunteers to monitor lakes. We also partner with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the US Geological Survey.

Committee Member Vento inquired about a voluntary non-profit. Staff stated it is something that could be discussed and open to the possibility.

Committee Member Vento used an example of the St. Croix River as a nationally recognized river, could resources be available from the US Department of the Interior to assist with the efforts? Staff stated this is a good idea to check into.

Committee Member Fredson stated he appreciates the engagement with the Committee and the opportunity to provide input. This was helpful. Regarding the priority of waters could we apply an equity lens to this effort. Can we look at connections and proximity to the BIPOC community in past

priority waters efforts? Can we use what we have learned from past prioritizations to shape our decision making moving forward? Additionally, he asked for clarity around metrics. He stated that he thinks drinking water sources should be weighted at the top of the list. He also was curious where access and clean water fall in the priorities list. Where there is clean water, we want to prioritize it and keep it clean, even though we might focus our time and energy on water that is somewhere in the middle. Staff stated that our current effort is only as good as the data sets that are collected. Over the past 10 years, the information has improved. Prior to that data was not as available in order to measure this. We have been discussing how to bring equity into the discussion. Weighting of categories and information used to prioritize waterbodies is also being discussed as part of the process.

Committee Member Fredson asked if property tax values would be included. Staff stated property tax values are currently not being considered. Staff added if there is support for adding property values into the analysis by the Committee, they can be considered.

Chair Lindstrom stated when he thinks of drinking water and equity he thinks of environmental justice and Flint, Michigan. He recommends ensuring environmental justice be considered as part of the process. He is supportive of citizen science which we do now. How many lakes are we monitoring with resident support? He encourages this activity. He is becoming more aware of contaminants of emerging concern such as PFOS. Staff appreciated this insight.

Committee Member Wulff is concerned about property values being taken into consideration for equity consideration. She is also concerned about collective metrics skewing towards highly populated areas and missing some of the more rural lakes and streams such as Vermillion River which is important to the region but in an area that is not as populated as other metro areas. Staff are also concerned about this and are taking this into consideration.

Committee Member Sterner stated this is an area of interest to him and suggested a work session to brainstorm and spend more time discussing. He shared some thoughts and insights from his perspective. It is easier to keep a body of water clean than to clean it up. We are like the glue that holds the 7-county metro area together. Interested to hear about the “bottom 10 bodies of water” to see what support may be needed. Does the list ever change once issues are addressed? He appreciates the work being done. Staff stated we would like to hold workshops in the future to spend more time and go into more detail on topics like this related to the water resources policy plan work in the future

Staff summed up the presentation by saying they are noting all comments and feedback received today and acknowledging there may be opportunity to provide more feedback in the future.

### 3. General Manager Report

No report at this time.

We had two very engaging information items today. Feedback, questions, comments were good. Environmental Services is meeting our mission to protect public health and the environment, but we also see the importance of our role to advance collective action in the region to support the purpose. When it comes to protecting water resources and public health, we do not see ourselves doing it alone. It takes partnership with other entities in the region to make sure we can do the best for the future. Committee member support is appreciated in our work.

If Committee members have items they would like brought before this committee, please let [leisa.thompson@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:leisa.thompson@metc.state.mn.us) know.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Business completed the meeting adjourned at 5:47 p.m.

## **CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Environment Committee Meeting of February 9, 2021.

Susan Taylor  
Recording Secretary