

Meeting Title: Master Water Supply Plan Community Technical Work Group Meeting #4

Date: April 21, 2015

Time: 9-11 a.m.

Location: 390 Robert St., St. Paul - Room LLA

Members in Attendance:

Mark Maloney, Shoreview
Jim Westerman, Woodbury (for Klay Eckles)
Bob Cockriel, Bloomington
Dale Folen, Minneapolis
Jim Graupmann, St. Paul
Brian Olson, Edina
Steve Albrecht, Burnsville
Jennifer Levitt, Cottage Grove
Steve Lillehaug, Brooklyn Center

Members Absent:

Michael Thompson, Maplewood
Bert Tracy, Golden Valley
Russ Matthys, Eagan
Klay Eckles, Woodbury

Met Council Staff in Attendance:

Jeannine Clancy
Sam Paske
Ali Elhassan
Lanya Ross
Brian Davis
Anneka Munsell
Deb Manning
Kyle Colvin
Judy Sventek
Angela Mazur

DNR Staff in Attendance:

Jason Moeckel
Joe Richter
Carmelita Nelson

Other Attendees:

Barb Huberty, Legislative Water Commission
Ray Wuolo, Barr Engineering

Meeting Notes:

Welcome & Introductions

Jeannine Clancy began the meeting by asking if there was any feedback from the minutes from meeting #3 or the agenda for meeting #4. No one had comments on these.

Discussion of draft Master Water Supply Plan

Lanya Ross began the discussion on the Master Water Supply Plan (MWSP) with a revised timeline of key milestones for the Plan's outreach and approval process.

A member asked for clarification on how the public input process works and what notification the public gets requesting its input. Lanya listed some of the ways the Met Council will be seeking input, such as public meetings, a robust contact list assembled in past meetings on the topic, and social media. She also discussed the possibility of ad-hoc information sessions, if CTWG members were aware of other interested groups.

In response to follow-up questions, Lanya confirmed that the formal public input process from the last water supply plan would also be used for this one, and that the draft document would be available for public review online after a new draft incorporating the Community Technical Work Group's feedback was completed, probably in June. She explained that her goal for this meeting was to listen intently to the conversation and make sure that the next draft reflects the feedback received.

Jeannine identified three key areas of discussion that had been highlighted in member feedback since meeting #3: uncertainties related to Metro Model 3 (MM3), conservation as a topic of emphasis in the MWSP, and sustainability. A member added that he would like to see river flow and groundwater recharge included in the conversation, as changes in the rules around these topics would affect everyone.

Members reiterated concerns expressed at previous meetings about the purpose of MM3 being made clear in the MWSP to prevent misinterpretations in the future. They explained that given the uncertainty inherent in the model, they felt that the language used in some places gave an impression that the model's results were more certain than they are. Examples were given where members felt "may" should be used instead of "will" when referring to current events.

Also on the topic of how the MWSP portrays MM3, a member said that he hoped the plan clearly articulates what the value of the model is in the big picture, and how it is being used to help inform regional discussions and determine whether and in what locations we are or aren't in trouble with regard to water supply.

Questions were posed by a member on the largest factors contributing to uncertainty; while the current draft documents suggest this is future water demand, he asked whether future water supply wouldn't be the largest contributor instead, or at least an equally contributing factor, since we are unsure of exactly how much we have.

The accuracy of a statement on page 51 about the costs of surface water treatment being close to groundwater was questioned.

A member emphasized that it's important that what different communities are required to do is fair and equitable, so there's not advantage or disadvantage to any one community, since unfair policies could really hinder communities. He added that he's doesn't understand in a practical sense what the MWSP will be to communities on a community-to-community level, or what effect it will have on towns with

development, if the 25% river cap mentioned at the previous meeting occurs. He felt the intentions were good, but was not clear on where we were headed yet.

Another member agreed and added that he keeps hearing there's an amount of water that can be drawn down and utilized to keep up with future demand, but that at the same time, future demand is not being taken into account for future land use planning.

Anneka Munsell explained that the 25% number was not set by DNR, but was only what was used in Met Council staff's model. Lanya said that it was intended to give us a sense as a region to where the groundwater limits might be, and how much can we get from groundwater and still meet goals of protecting surface water, not causing well interference, etc. She said that there is still debate around to what degree the flow in the Mississippi River needs to be protected, but that their goal with the 25% number was to preserve some resiliency in drought periods like the one being experienced now. A member called out a reference to the maximum amount of groundwater being a potential issue; that it is problematic to point communities toward surface water sources when numbers for the maximum withdrawal of water without negative impacts only exist for groundwater, not surface water.

Ali Elhassan explained that the limited number of results provided to the group so far had to do with the time that it takes to complete a model run, and that other scenarios suggested by communities could be run to show different what-if scenarios.

Lanya was asked whether the MM3 results would guide the community profiles in the MWSP. She confirmed that the results of MM3 scenarios evaluating 2040 demand would, but that the optimization model would not be used for this purpose. She explained that the question she is trying to answer in this portion of the community profiles is whether there could be water supply issues in a community in the future if we continue to rely on current sources, given the predicted rate of water demand. The profiles look at issues like whether there's a risk of aquifer decline or a vulnerable drinking water supply area, and help communities identify whether they have monitoring in place in potential problem areas.

Jeannine suggested that the conversation transition to conservation. Members expressed that they were troubled by the draft plan's assertion on page 19 that conservation is a short-term strategy, when they consider it a long-term part of their business model. One member said that statements like this suggest a bias away from conservation and toward other, grander solutions to potential limits in water supply, such as surface water infrastructure.

Another member added that he felt this statement ignored the conservation successes that have already been accomplished at great expense and effort. He thought it was contradictory to past and current conservation efforts, and explained that he felt conservation was as big a part of the solution as anything else that communities can realistically accomplish. Other members agreed that conservation recognizes the significant investment the public has already made in infrastructure, and sends the message that more will not be spent unnecessarily. They felt conservation vs. new infrastructure cost comparisons give them a tool to persuade the public and city councils of the benefits of this approach.

Group members felt that there was a disconnect in the level of focus given to conservation in various areas of the MWSP draft, that if the strategy was given more weight later, in the implementation section of the document, and that cleanup was needed to make the message more consistent.

A member observed that the part communities would struggle with is how conservation might be enforced across the region, given the different challenges faced by different communities. He discussed the difficulties a community might face even if it conserved, if the surrounding communities did not also do so.

Another member pointed out that Minneapolis and St. Paul have a different view: since their demand is already going down, an emphasis on conservation doesn't make as much sense for their situations. He also mentioned that conservation doesn't make much sense for them because most of what they take out of the river, they put back in. Jeannine acknowledged that representing the differing views of all stakeholders has been one of the challenges of drafting the MWSP.

Ali then posed two questions: whether members were concerned with conservation's potential impacts on revenue, and whether they hesitate to implement conservation if neighboring communities aren't doing so at the same time.

Group members were not, in general, concerned with conservation's impact on funding, and explained that they felt the culture has shifted on this in the last fifteen years, to the point where it is already being discussed by city councils. They acknowledged that this may be more of a concern for communities with aging infrastructure, but emphasized that this conversation is already happening within and between municipalities, including discussion of rate increases, and that they consider it a local issue rather than a regional one.

One member reiterated that there is potential to get traction with the message that changing behavior to conserve will allow communities to not build extraneous infrastructure, which is a better management of public assets.

Sam Paske asked if there was tension within the group over the plan overstating vs. understating the case for conservation? Members said again that they were already thinking about conservation, and that the marketplace is pointing them in that direction, so the plan should dovetail with other existing messages communities are receiving on conservation. They felt that it also frames cost discussions going forward, and as such, should not be glossed over.

DNR staff commented that another part of the incentive to conserve is to reduce the risk of pulling contaminated groundwater into aquifers. They felt it was important that be clear in the plan so people can find tools in the plan that make sense to their communities and circumstances.

Jeannine suggested that the conversation transition to the perceived bias toward surface water, and the associated costs of infrastructure.

Additional feedback was provided by the group about areas where they felt the draft MWSP was biased toward surface water, and in general did not adequately convey uncertainty. Specific examples included a sentence on page 40 about how investing in one source is not sustainable, where members felt "surface water" could fit into that sentence as appropriately as had "Prairie du Chien Aquifer," and a statement on page 31 that no single source can sustainably supply the region's future water demand, which was felt to be misleading. Several members indicated that they would pass on additional specific call-outs of this nature to Lanya.

Members explained that the problem was not necessarily that statements made were incorrect, but rather that they felt they were misleading, that they were leading readers down a path that isn't the only or necessarily even the right path. There was concern from the group that the way the plan talked about the use of a sole source made communities that have historically invested in infrastructure in this way look like the bad guys, and that more context was needed. A member said that he thought the intent was to say that the region cannot rely on a single source, not that individual communities could not, but others didn't feel this was made clear enough.

Lanya was asked about the draft plan's focus on municipal users rather than agricultural or industrial users; some members felt this wasn't addressed to an appropriate level given their impact. Lanya explained that municipal water demand is the largest and fastest-growing use, so that's why it was the main focus. She said that other users are discussed in Appendix 1, and that she would like to build on this more in the community profiles. Members agreed that the community profiles would be a good location for this information.

Concerns with page 51 in draft plan were brought up by members, who were again uncertain why finance and funding were being discussed. Lanya explained that this is a topic that has come up repeatedly at public meetings over the past year, and that she wanted to have a place in the plan where it's acknowledged that the cost of solutions must be part of the thinking. She said that finding an appropriate place for that in the document has been a challenge, and asked if the group had suggestions for a better place for it, or a better approach to the topic.

One source of the group's discomfort with this topic in the plan was a legislative bill requesting the ability to collect a regional fee, to be spent on regional water issues. Members were very concerned over the intent of that legislation and the precedent it might set.

Several group members did think there should be more emphasis on the funding gaps that cause a burden for communities with regard to local monitoring efforts and, when necessary, building new infrastructure to more sustainably address future demand. Members were still not comfortable with the idea of a regional fee, but felt that some sort of grant program could be very helpful in allowing them to provide solutions that are beneficial both to the region and to their local communities.

Jason Moeckel reminded the group that while the Legislature had given the DNR money for monitoring efforts out of the Clean Water Fund, it was only half of the amount needed, and there is no clear vision yet on where the rest will come from. He also commented that several group members had brought up that communities invest in infrastructure thinking it will last a long time, and that he felt what the plan should do is help communities have the information to make good long-term investments.

Jeannine asked whether the group was in favor of another meeting, since the time remaining was not enough to address all the topics on the agenda. Several members said they would like another meeting to cover those topics.

Draft Local Water Supply Template

Jeannine introduced Carmelita Nelson from the DNR, who provided the group with the draft Local Water Supply Template. A member suggested a copy of this also be sent to Metro Cities.

Members were concerned with tables that presented information on local investments in infrastructure. Lanya explained that those sections were a placeholder and would be revised. Members were emphatic

that they didn't think this was the right way or place to address issues with local spending on infrastructure. Carmelita asked that group members not spend a lot of time on the section that would be heavily edited, suggesting that if they had limited time to review the template, they could focus on the water conservation plans.

A member asked whether the DNR was going to position themselves to be able to tell industrial users they can't have private wells if they don't conserve. Jason said that based on his understanding, the DNR doesn't have that authority, though there is local authority to place limits on private business wells within municipalities. The member acknowledged this, but said that he was concerned that if the issue was brought up, well drillers might increase their efforts trying to get legislation to remove this local authority as they had in the past.

Carmelita requested that the group send feedback to her by May 10th, as she was hoping to do a soft rollout of the document in June.

Other comments/evaluation/ conclusion

Jeannine reviewed the topics the group would like to see at the next meeting, on May 12th and requested that they let her know if they would like anything else added to the agenda. She confirmed that minor questions about tone and wording in the draft MWSP should be directed to Lanya.

Sam added that Met Council staff are approaching the time when we would like to open the draft MWSP up for more comments from a broader group, such as communities that aren't in the CTWG, and would like to make sure we have addressed all the big issues the CTWG had brought up, though additional refinement would occur throughout the more open feedback period.

A member expressed that the group was hopeful that their feedback would help so that the same issues don't need to be revisited many times once the feedback group is broadened.

Jeannine thanked the group for their input and asked that they complete the review forms in their packets.

Adjournment

11:20 am