



Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) Meeting

February 14, 2024 – 4:30 p.m.

In-person and Microsoft Teams Videoconference

WPC Members in Attendance

Jim Kotz Brad Blackett
Josh Borton Andy Riesgraf
Steve Hamrick Kevin Chamberlain

VRWJPO Staff in Attendance

Travis Thiel, Watershed Administrator
Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications & Outreach Specialist

Others in Attendance

Anne Sawyer, MN Board of Water and Soil Resources
Curt Coudron, Dakota County SWCD
Nikki Stewart, Dakota County, Environmental Resources Department Director (virtual)

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jim Kotz at 4:31 p.m.

2. Election of Watershed Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair

Travis Thiel called for nominations for the Chair. Josh Borton nominated James Kotz for Chair. There were no other nominations. James Kotz was elected Chair by acclamation. Travis Thiel called for nominations for Vice-chair. Steve Hamrick nominated Josh Borton for Vice-chair. There were no other nominations. Josh Borton was elected Vice-chair by acclamation.

3. Roll Call

All members were in attendance except Sandra Weber and Linda Larson

4. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

5. Approval of Agenda

*Motion by Commissioner Borton to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Chamberlain.
Motion carried on an 6-0 vote.*

6. Approval of Minutes from the November 15, 2023 Meeting

*Motion by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Borton.
Motion carried on an 6-0 vote.*

7. Business Items

a. Approval of Revised 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting Dates

Travis Thiel presented a revised Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) meeting schedule based on discussion that occurred at the November 15, 2023 meeting. The revised meeting schedule is proposed as follows:

- February 14
- May 8
- August 14
- November 20

*Motion by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Blackett.
Motion carried on an 6-0 vote.*

b. Review and Discuss Results from the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission's 2026-2035 Watershed Plan Stakeholder Issues Prioritization Survey

Travis Thiel presented the topic of the survey that was sent out to the WPC. The survey's purpose was to identify stakeholder-identified issues and whether the issue was essential for the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) to do, good for the VRWJPO to do, or not the VRWJPO's work. And for those that are essential or good for the VRWJPO to do, which are a high, medium, or low priority. Of those surveys received to date, results from the survey were presented to the WPC, and Travis mentioned this survey was conducted with the Technical Advisory Group to better filter which issues or priorities are the most critical for staff to incorporate into the 2026-2035 Watershed Management Plan.

Commissioner Borton indicated the survey wasn't mobile device friendly should staff wish to perform future surveys. Staff will look into this before any future surveys are sent out.

c. Presentation of Draft Vermillion River Watershed Brand Awareness Plan

Brita Moore-Kutz presented the outline of methods identified in the Brand Awareness Plan. WPC members discussed some of the methods. Commissioner Kotz asked why the State didn't have more of a role in highlighting the work of watershed organizations and their role as a local government unit. Commissioner Kotz also mentioned that incorporating information into City newsletters would be another good opportunity for information incorporation. Lastly, Commissioner Kotz asked whether staff could provide presentations to city councils that provide background on the watershed. Commissioner

Blackett asked whether the WPC could assist with this effort as they are residents of local communities. Travis Thiel mentioned there was no issue with WPC members assisting with that effort provided they represent the VRWJPO's interests rather than their own personal interest as they may differ. Travis Thiel indicated staff often get the question from stakeholders about who the VRWJPO is or what the organization does, so staff have created a one-page document to help answer those questions for stakeholders.

Commissioner Riesgraf asked whether staff could provide a tour to various city councils to highlight projects. Travis Thiel indicated the tours staff organize are for that purpose, but we rarely get participation by local city council members even with a concerted efforts to invite them. Brita Moore-Kutz indicated other organizations have also tried this and their successes usually come from developing content tailored specific to the target audience rather than broader watershed-wide efforts. Commissioner Chamberlain asked whether a static display could be placed at different locations to provide VRWJPO information, and Brita indicated it could. Commissioner Blackett indicated there could be opportunities to promote the VRWJPO with faith-based organizations.

d. Presentation and Discussion of Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2024 Budget-Identified Capital Improvement Projects

Travis Thiel provided a PowerPoint presentation on the various projects that will be constructed, installed, or implemented in 2024. Commissioner Riesgraf asked whether there was any monitoring planned for the Foxborough Park project or others to evaluate how effective these types of projects are. Travis indicated he's done some of this at previously installed projects but didn't have anything formalized with planned 2024 projects and would task the new Senior Watershed Specialist with this task.

Commissioner Riesgraf asked whether fencing is planned around the East Lake Fish Barrier project considering the electricity in the water. Commissioner Borton asked whether any monitoring will be done at this project to evaluate whether the barrier is effective at deterring fish movement. Staff indicated some testing of the electrical field in the water is required but would look further into evaluating its effectiveness at deterring movement. Commissioner Blackett asked if there's any concern about vandalism. Staff indicated that all reasonable means of preventing vandalism are performed, but if someone wants to vandalize something they will figure out a way to do it.

Some general discussion occurred about the proposed recirculation system at the Avonlea Park splash pad and the stormwater reuse system. Commissioner Blackett mentioned some potential challenges with launching a barge for the alum application in Alimagnet Lake. Staff are evaluating that and will incorporate necessary information into bid documents to that contractors are aware of these challenges.

Commissioner Riesgraf asked why the bulk of the projects are occurring in Lakeville. Travis indicated some of this is the result of the prioritization in the Watershed Plan that provides more funding for higher priority subwatersheds. Those subwatersheds identified as headwaters subwatersheds were considered a higher priority and were allocated more funding in the plan. Lakeville just happens to be

within three of these headwaters subwatersheds. Lakeville also provides staff and funding resources for projects that create more opportunities for improvements compared to other communities that don't have the same resources available. Commissioner Riesgraf argued that some of the downstream degradation may be the result of upstream impacts, so we should also consider assisting as we can with downstream areas. Travis indicated we're willing to participate with projects elsewhere if the communities would bring project ideas to staff for discussion. Commissioner Chamberlain mentioned that the Soil and Water Conservation District are also a conduit to assisting with projects further downstream and in the rural communities.

7. Updates

a. Chairperson's Report

Chair Kotz emphasized that WPC members should be engaging with local elected official regarding the VRWJPO's work.

b. Staff Updates

Travis Thiel

Travis shared he has hired someone to backfill the Senior Watershed Specialist position and she will be starting soon. Travis also shared that staff have wrapped up phase 1 (issue identification) of the Watershed Plan development process. Lastly, Travis emphasized the desire to have WPC members at the Strategic Planning Session with the Joint Powers Board on March 21st.

Brita Moore-Kutz

Brita shared she will be at upcoming events in Rosemount that tie into the Brand Awareness Plan

Anne Sawyer (BWSR)

Anne appreciates hearing about the process and how staff have reached out to the various stakeholders used for the Watershed Plan Development process.

Curt Coudron (Dakota SWCD)

SWCD updated their cost share policy for 2024 that affects the VRWJPO since some VRWJPO funds are funneled through the SWCD for projects. There's a pilot program called Lawns Reimagined that SWCD will be rolling out in 2024 that will work to convert residential traditional turf lawns into low-input turf lawns using fescues. Landscaping for Clean Water workshops are schedules starting in February and design workshops will occur later in 2024. Some discussion occurred regarding the Lawns Reimagined program.

8. Adjourn

Motion by Commissioner Borton, second by Commissioner Riesgraf. Motion carried on an 6-0 vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:08 p.m.