

**ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMISSION MINUTES
CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS**

City Council Chambers - 8150 Barbara Avenue
Thursday, March 27, 2025 - 7:00 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Goodman called the Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Sara Goodman (Chair)
 Marjorie Savage
 Tracie Killion
 Nick Ruiz
 Jon Wallerick
 Nichole Boehmke

Commissioners Absent: Kevin Sethre - excused
 Patti Mikulski - not excused
 Ted Trenzeluk - excused

3. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes of the November 14, 2024, Environmental Advisory Commission Meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Killion, Second by Commissioner Ruiz, to Approve Minutes as Submitted.

Ayes: 6

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

4. REGULAR BUSINESS

A. Presentation on Conservation Programs offered by the Dakota County Soil & Water Conservation District and Watershed Management Organizations in Inver Grove Heights.

Program Management Supervisor Joe Barten with the Dakota County Soil & Water Conservation District and Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization presented.

County Soil & Water Conservation Districts and local Watershed Management Organizations focus on surface water (lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands) quality, as there are other organizations and government bodies that focus on groundwater. County SWCDs formed in the 1940s to work with farmers after the Dust Bowl.

The Dakota County SWCD is funded through the county, local partnerships, and grants. Dakota County SWCD does not have land use authority or taxing authority. There are 11-12 staff members, including biologists, planners, landscape designers, wetland specialists, environmental scientists, ecologists, and educators. There is also a five-member elected board.

Dakota County SWCD's mission is to work with landowners to help them manage land and water resources. Most land is privately owned, so voluntary conservation practices by landowners play an

important role in protecting water resources. The Dakota County SWCD identifies local conservation priorities and projects (land surveys, cover crop planting, gully stabilization, etc.) and provides technical assistance for long-term success.

In rural areas, the focus is on minimizing erosion, slowing water, and sediment control. Outreach to farmer leaders is an important part of this work. Dakota County SWCD helps with implementation of new regulations, e.g. the 50-foot buffer law enacted in 2015. They also handle county funds for addressing massive problems (e.g., erosion control after flooding).

In urban areas, the Dakota County SWCD partners with cities and local businesses to help fund and maintain large-scale stormwater management projects (building raingardens, adding iron/sand to sediment basins to remove dissolved phosphorus, engineering baffles to intercept trash from entering stormwater systems, etc.)

The Dakota County SWCD also provides environmental education through programs like Outdoor Education Days for elementary schools.

A recent pilot program is Lawns Reimagined, which started last year and helped 11 homeowners replace their lawns with low-input fescue grass that does not require as much fertilizer or mowing.

The Landscaping for Clean Water program provides education to homeowners about adding native plants and raingardens and restoring shorelines. These projects help alleviate runoff issues, keeping pollutants out of storm sewers, which improves water quality in the metro area. The program includes introduction, design, and maintenance classes as well as a \$250 grant to help with project funding.

The Dakota County SWCD manages classes and provides technical assistance, the WMOs provide funding for grants, and cities help spread awareness to residents, fund matching grants, and provide space to host classes. This program is also supported by volunteers: contractors, Master Gardeners, etc.

Since 2007, over 800 Landscaping for Clean Water projects have been installed in Dakota County. In 2024, 200 people took the introduction class, and there were 44 projects installed. In 2025, Dakota County SWCD created a marketing video for the program to raise awareness.

Dakota County SWCD Goals:

- Collaboration and financial savings
- Protect surface water quality
- Civic engagement and public outreach
- Involvement in watershed planning
- Land and habitat protection

Mr. Barten then discussed Water Management Organizations further.

The 1982 Surface Water Management Act mandates water management organizations in the seven-county metro area.

The types of Watershed Management Organizations (WMOs) and number of each in Dakota County are:

- Joint Powers Organizations - 1
- Local-government-led Watershed Districts - 1
- County-led Water Management Organizations - 4

WMOs can choose to impose regulations, but typically, their desired outcomes are met via city permitting processes.

Because there are inter-community drainage/flow issues, the WMO provides a forum for discussion/planning. It also codifies cost-sharing to address these.

Each WMO creates a 10-year management plan, but cities can also petition to get specific projects done.

There are two WMOs in Inver Grove Heights:

- The Eagan-Inver Grove Heights WMO was formerly called the Gun Club Lake WMO. There are five board members. They are currently updating their 10-year plan.
- The Lower Mississippi River WMO was formed in 1985. There are seven member cities, and the majority of funds come from city dues. The current 10-year plan was created in 2023.

WMOs offer cities improved access to state grant funds.

The project cycle typically includes water monitoring to identify issues, completing studies to validate issues and engineer solutions, getting funding, implementing solutions, then more water monitoring to assess impact.

As there are no Minnesota Pollution Control Agency-designated Impaired Waters (except the Mississippi River) in Inver Grove Heights, the Lower Mississippi River WMO 10-year plan focuses on DNR public water bodies and DNR wetlands as well as stormwater ponds. Prioritizing happens via collaboration with technical and citizen committees.

In Inver Grove Heights, the priorities are Seidls Lake, Simley Lake, Rosenberger Lake, Ohmans Lake (part of Marcott Chain), and Hornbeam.

Inver Grove Heights' topography includes lots of landlocked basins, leading to some temporary flooding issues. Generally, soils are well-infiltrating, so there is lots of groundwater recharge. The Lower Mississippi River WMO does water monitoring through the Community-Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP) through Metropolitan Council using their labs, testing equipment, and sample-collecting volunteers. Other metro watershed partners include Minnesota Water Stewards, Adopt a Storm Drain, and the drain stenciling program.

Other recent outreach efforts have included chloride education for contractors to help reduce salt use and creating an Illicit Discharge video used throughout the metropolitan area to increase awareness.

In May, Mr. Barten will present to the EAC the annual Water Pollution Prevention. He mentioned that he also acts as a consultant for smaller cities who do not have resources for water management staff positions.

He mentioned the following as examples of how studies are tied to specific project implementation:

- Seidls Lake Outlet Feasibility Study (2004) - led to a recently-completed South St. Paul outlet project
- Cherokee Heights (St. Paul) Culvert Analysis - led to an erosion project
- Mississippi River direct drainage study - led to multiple direct drainage issues and projects being identified

The goal is to provide cost information, mapping, and concept-level design for water management projects in advance so that when cities do street reconstruction, they can incorporate these projects to increase efficiency/cost effectiveness.

Inver Grove Heights and South St. Paul are closely collaborating on Seidls Lake. Both cities have Park Master Plans addressing the water quality issues there (due to increased development and associated stormwater runoff), and both prioritized improving Seidls Lake due to a lack of other park land nearby.

Projects have included adding an iron-enhanced sand filter to treat stormwater coming into the lake, putting a hydrodynamic separator underground to filter sediment and capture trash before it reaches the lake, and creating a tree trench on the north end of lake to filter water in a series of pipes.

The outlet project at Seidls Lake led to erosion issues, and to minimize that, the Lower Mississippi River WMO implemented shoreline restoration - that will be completed in Spring 2025.

The Lower Mississippi River WMO also creates and shares water quality fact sheets for local water bodies to track the impact of water quality improvement projects over the long term.

Upcoming projects

- Watershed-wide modeling effort
 - o Partner with IGH's own modeling effort
 - o Provide dataset that will identify areas of concern
- Fish tissue contaminant monitoring (PFAS, PAHs)
 - o Funded via \$17,000 from a Monsanto settlement
 - o Goal: add signage if human health concerns are identified
- Seidls and Thompson Lake water improvement projects
 - o Funding would be via the 3M settlement grant
- Seidls Lake shoreline restoration
- Direct drainage study project implementation
- Ivy Falls Creek and Watershed Study (Mendota Heights)

Mr. Barten also mentioned the upcoming Community Partners Outreach Package project, which will involve sharing information/materials to promote conservation programs directly on Facebook and Nextdoor.

Commissioner Savage thanked Mr. Barten for the presentation and inquired if the City had any streams. Mr. Barten stated that there are not any officially.

Commissioner Killion inquired about the Groveland Park stream going from Southview Country Club to the DNR pond near Acorn Mini Storage. Mr. Barten stated that it might be an intermittent stream.

Commissioner Savage stated that she would like to see more community involvement and is looking forward to getting more information about those opportunities.

Commissioner Killion questioned if vacuuming out sump catch basins needs to happen more frequently. Mr. Barten stated that the cleaning cycles are based on the type of structure. He clarified that city staff typically increase the frequency of vacuuming when needed.

Commissioner Killion inquired about filtration innovations. Mr. Barten mentioned underground chambers but said that surface-level solutions are often cheaper. One system is called the Jellyfish Filter (made of a membrane that can also collect oils and nutrients from runoff). However, maintenance of these systems can be expensive and labor-intensive – removing, cleaning, replacing cartridges, etc. Often, it is helpful to install systems with maintenance needs that cities already have the equipment and staff for -- e.g., vacuum trucks for vacuuming out sump catch basins. Cities continue to add infrastructure, and there are an ever-increasing number of regulations, so cities are bearing increased maintenance costs. Thus, the Dakota County SWCD and the Lower Mississippi River WMO emphasize passive projects with minimal maintenance.

Chair Goodman questioned whether the Dakota County SWCD or Lower Mississippi River WMO get involved with cities during street reconstruction projects to identify relevant water projects. Mr. Barten stated that the 10-year plan does lead to those conversations, but more collaboration would be ideal. He hopes to set up an annual meeting to ensure alignment of street reconstruction projects with stormwater treatment opportunities. For example, Mendota Heights recently installed three raingardens during a street reconstruction. He noted that the state grant funding that his organizations can help cities access is marked for voluntary conservation projects, so if a project were planned to ensure compliance (i.e., not voluntary), they cannot help with funding.

Commissioner Ruiz inquired as to whether there is research on cost savings through the Lawns Reimagined program, could this help convince more homeowners to participate. Mr. Barten stated that the Vermilion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization is working with Dakota County and the University of Minnesota to find a graduate student who could undertake a research project to answer that question in the next few years. One outcome of the Lawns Reimagined project is to identify ideal fescue species and what each needs to thrive in Minnesota's climate.

Commissioner Ruiz referred to a recent wetland replacement that was in a nearby County instead of Dakota County. Mr. Barten stated that there are exemptions to replacement requirements if a wetland was manmade rather than naturally occurring. Commissioner Ruiz clarified that the wetland was replaced, but the replacement was in another county. Mr. Barten stated that there is no requirement (from the LMRWMO) that wetland replacement happen within the county of the removed wetland. There aren't many wetland banks, which would make that requirement onerous. He guessed that the

project developers probably put the replacement in Rice County due to the lower cost of wetland credits there.

Commissioner Ruiz referred to another local project, a gravel mine, and raised groundwater concerns. Mr. Barten stated that the North Cannon River WMO in Southern Dakota County recently came up with a model mining ordinance that townships could adopt. He noted that groundwater pumping is allowed for mining land use. If there is no city ordinance specific to mining, the mining company only has to abide by state requirements. He added that cities may not have statutory authority in this arena, depending on the specific project.

Commissioner Wallerick thanked Mr. Barten and asked about whether the Landscaping for Clean Water program partners with local businesses, e.g. Gertens. Mr. Barten stated that there have been program flyers in Gertens store and said that Gertens is included on a list of local suppliers provided to program participants. He would look into the possibility of hosting Landscaping for Clean Water classes at Gertens.

Commissioner Boehmke stated that she appreciated the presentation and hearing about upcoming projects and partnerships.

Mr. Barten stated that he hoped to begin hosting annual meetings with all city partners to improve lines of communication, especially considering turnover with commission members, city staff, etc.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

6. COMMISSIONER AND STAFF COMMENTS

Chair Goodman stated that she is a member of The Grove Aquatics Center, and she asked City Staff to look into providing organics collection in the restrooms there.

Community Development Support Specialist Bodsberg stated that there will be an Environmental Advisory Commission meeting in April.

7. ADJOURN

Motion by Savage, Second by Killion, to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m.

Ayes: 6

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by Will Clashe, Recording Secretary.