

## Memorandum

To: Roundtable participants

cc: Mayor Betsy Hodges; Minneapolis City Council

From: Spencer Cronk, Minneapolis City Coordinator

Date: August 1, 2016

Subject: Results Minneapolis follow-up: Healthy Lakes, Rivers and Streams

Thank you for participating in our recent Results Minneapolis roundtable conversation on Healthy Lakes, Rivers and Streams. This roundtable was a unique opportunity for staff, leadership, elected officials from the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, and stakeholders from many outside agencies and organizations to engage in a robust discussion about the complex factors that influence the quality and aesthetic condition of surface waters in Minneapolis. The roundtable focused on two primary indicators of water quality: the Lake Aesthetic and User Recreation Index (LAURI) and Impaired Water Bodies. The following memo describes the major themes and potential action steps that emerged during the conversation.

***Theme: The City has an opportunity to lead regional and national efforts to protect water quality from harmful chlorides by modifying road and sidewalk salting methods.***

Salt applied to icy winter streets and sidewalks contributes chloride to our local water bodies. In eight Minneapolis waters, the measured level of chloride exceeds Minnesota water quality standards for aquatic life. Because chloride does not break down over time, its long-term impacts on aquatic life and habitat quality are difficult and expensive to reverse. At the same time, protecting the safety of the traveling public during the winter is a critical priority for the City. Although no state or federal legislation currently exists to regulate the application of road salt, Minneapolis has an opportunity to lead by example.

- **Potential action step: Continue to make progress toward a local “salt plan” for streets and sidewalks that balances public safety and water quality.** Local implementation of such a plan and the documentation of its outcomes over time could help build a case for statewide salting policy recommendations.
- **Potential action step: Improve staff training and quality control for local road salt application.** There is room for the City to further train its street maintenance staff on proper salting methods to avoid excessive application. The City is also exploring improved quality control technology and equipment to more precisely calibrate the amount of road salt applied with current and expected road conditions.
- **Potential action step: Adjust City-managed contracts with private companies in order to help reduce unnecessary salting.** For example, the City could examine ways to revise RFPs with companies that maintain special service districts as these areas are often excessively salted during the winter.
- **Potential action step: Consider further advocacy for statewide policies that would reduce barriers to unnecessary salting.** For example, the state of New Hampshire allows commercial salt applicators, and property owners or managers who hire them, to be protected from liability against damages from snow and

ice conditions if they complete a voluntary certification program sponsored by the state. A similar statewide policy has been proposed in the Minnesota Legislature, and further advocacy is needed to help it progress.

***Theme: Because water knows no political boundaries, departments, sectors and jurisdictions need to stay connected and collaborate.***

While many sources of water quality degradation are local, effective long-term water quality protection depends on deeper and more widespread collaboration. Further aligning resources and sharing data across departments, sectors, and jurisdictions can improve efficiency and generate a greater impact than what isolated efforts can achieve. Building a resilient political framework for water protection will require agencies and organizations to think beyond their traditional jurisdictional boundaries and to collaborate where resource constraints or common objectives make it sensible to do so.

- **Potential action step: Continue to pursue mechanisms for collaboration with neighboring municipalities, particularly those located upstream.** Because Minneapolis water quality is influenced by the land use decisions of upstream landowners and municipalities, collaboration with neighboring municipalities can help reduce impacts that the City and Park Board must manage.
- **Potential action step: Explore ways to align capital investments in water quality.** From sharing equipment to coordinating the timing and placement of infrastructure projects, building partnerships for environmental management can improve efficiency and more fully leverage large, long-term water quality investments.
- **Potential action step: Build connections to industry and research.** Attending and contributing to events such as the University of Minnesota’s Road Salt Convention can help the City connect with industry leaders and build cutting-edge information into local and regional water quality efforts.
- **Potential action step: Educate elected officials about the importance of water quality action.** Continuing to find compelling ways to share science-based information with elected officials can help translate science into policy.

***Theme: Involving the public in water quality protection is critical.***

Minneapolis residents and business owners can play an important role in managing and limiting the pollution sources they influence. Public action can reduce the need for costly infrastructure improvements and restoration programs. While Minneapolis is fortunate to have many individuals and groups who are already highly engaged in water quality protection, there is room to motivate even more residents and business owners to prevent and manage their contributions to water degradation and to support them as they take positive steps toward that end.

- **Potential action step: Take advantage of cost-effective and creative ways to motivate behavior change.** Creative communication and outreach strategies can catalyze public motivation and behavior change to protect nearby water bodies. For instance, the City could offer yard signage or window decals, pledges, and certification programs in return for residents or businesses implementing a particular change.

Examples include:

- “Excuse our dandelions” signs like those posted outside the Metropolitan Council’s wastewater treatment facilities
- Signs that say “This is a low chemical lawn” or “My sidewalk is on a low-salt diet”

- **Potential action step: Expand opportunities to provide high-quality educational programming for adults.** Many local programs successfully educate children about the dynamics of water quality and how household-level decisions made today can affect water quality tomorrow. There are opportunities to scale up this programming for adults. The Metro WaterShed Partners Exhibits developed at Hamline University are one example of successful, interactive water quality educational materials.
- **Potential action step: Pursue opportunities to adjust public perception and expectations when they conflict with water protection needs.** Public expectations – about the presence or absence of weeds in a landscape in the summer or the speed at which the City or contractors are able to clear streets after a storm – have important implications for water quality. The City, Park Board and partnering agencies could pursue opportunities to discuss these expectations and communicate their water quality tradeoffs to the public.
- **Potential action step: Expand on the LAURI’s user-friendly mission by communicating specific actions that residents can take to improve water quality.** The Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board uses the LAURI to invite public awareness of water conditions on measured lakes in Minneapolis. To leverage public motivation and turn the LAURI into action, the Park Board could add information about the biggest specific opportunities for improvement at each lake and outline ways the public can help.
- **Potential action step: Consider sourcing some types of water quality data from the community.** For example, the aesthetic component of the LAURI is designed to capture the public experience at a Minneapolis water body. There may be opportunities to involve the public in contributing data to this and other similar measures.

Thank you once again for your participation in this roundtable discussion. Our report, should you wish to review it again or share it, is available on the Results Minneapolis website: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/coordinator/rm/Monitoring/CityGoalResultsMinneapolis/index.htm>. We are excited about the action steps identified at this roundtable discussion. Implementing any of these action steps would contribute to improvements in the quality and aesthetic condition of surface waters in Minneapolis. We look forward to continued collaboration on this important topic.