

**Vadnais Lake Area Water Management Organization
Technical Commission (TEC) Minutes
March 11, 2026
Vadnais Heights City Hall, Council Chambers
800 County Road E East, Vadnais Heights, MN 55127**

Commission Members Present:

Jim Hauth (alternate) Vadnais Heights (VH)
Gloria Tessier Gem Lake (GL)
Susan Miller North Oaks (NO)
Jami Philip White Bear Township (WBT)

Absent: Nick Ousky (Vadnais Heights); Tom Hoffman (Lino Lakes); Terry Huntrods (White Bear Lake).

Others in attendance: Phil Belfiori, Brian Corcoran, Dawn Tanner, Lauren Sampedro, Angela Hugunin (VLAWMO staff).

I. Call to Order

Vice Chair Tessier called the meeting to order at 8:14 am.

II. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve the March 11, 2026 TEC agenda as revised. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

III. Approval of Minutes (February 11, 2026)

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve the February 11, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

IV. Administration & Operations

A. March Financial Report and Consider Authorization for Payment

Administrator Belfiori summarized the March financial statement as included in the TEC packet. He highlighted expenses from the previous month including the final storm sewer utility refunds, staff costs, watershed management plan work, payment to Blue Thumb, and technical review for the Wilkinson phase 2 project. He noted there were few expenses overall.

Administrator Belfiori recommended approval of the March financial report and payment of the bills.

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve the March financial report and authorize for payment. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

V. Programs

A. LL1 2026-01 Ballering Rain Garden Application Phase 2

Sampedro presented a Landscape Level 1 Grant application for a rain garden and native plantings as the second phase of a multi-phase project on the property. She noted the proposed rain garden would capture runoff from the street and adjacent properties. She said the property drains to Pleasant Lake and the proposed rain garden is in a visible location.

Sampedro described the project phases and stated the first phase of the project was a bee lawn that was completed in November.

Commissioner Miller asked how bee lawn establishment had gone given the area's shade. Sampedro affirmed that establishment had gone well so far and will be revisited this summer.

Sampedro described the second project phase would involve a variety of native plants for slope stabilization, the rain garden, and a native plant restoration adjacent to the rain garden. The total estimated project cost is \$10,111.61.

Alternate Commissioner Hauth asked how the pollutant reduction load for phosphorus and total suspended solids equate to similar projects that have happened. Sampedro responded that this project is comparable to other small-scale curb cut rain garden projects such as a few completed through a street rehabilitation project in White Bear Lake. She noted that total phosphorus would be expected to be higher, closer to 0.5 pounds or more, with larger-scale projects, but with this size of a project it is on track.

Staff recommended approval of LL1 2026-01 in the amount of \$7,500.

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve LL1 2026-01 in the amount of \$7,500. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

B. SHG 2026-02 Gorder Native Plant Restoration Application

Sampedro presented a Soil Health Grant application for a 12,075 square foot native plant restoration in North Oaks. This project was included in the revised packet materials. Sampedro shared that the proposed project location is in the direct drainage area of Deep Lake, as well as in a priority zone for habitat. Sampedro noted that this proposed project is on the site of a demolished home and near a space with over an acre of restored prairie. The combination of these projects will effectively create a corridor of habitat.

Commissioner Philip asked if the applicant is using a seed mix pack for replacing buckthorn. Sampedro responded that the buckthorn replacement plant kits were proposed with the previous grant project.

Commissioner Philip asked if it's possible to have hydroseed for this scale of project. Sampedro responded that she has observed hydroseeding used for native plant projects before, but the applicant's contractor is proposing to use the drill seed method. She noted that in this project, they are prioritizing planting the potted plants and supplementing them with seeding.

Commissioner Miller commented that the project should establish well but noted the presence of turkey pressure on plants in the area. Sampedro responded that the plants were selected for the site conditions and noted the homeowners have an existing native restoration on their adjacent property that has been well maintained for several years. Commissioner Miller affirmed the applicant has a dedicated focus on project maintenance.

Alternate Commissioner Hauth asked if there were protections in place should someone later move in and wish to rebuild on this property. Sampedro responded that the grant program doesn't require projects to be declared to the property, but it requires the project to remain in place for five years. After that, it could go away. Alternate Commissioner Hauth clarified that the terms are five years. Sampedro confirmed.

Staff recommended approval of SHG 2026-02 in the amount of \$1,250.

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve SHG 2026-02 in the amount of \$1,250. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

C. Watershed Awards Voting

Huginin presented the three nominations received for the 2025 Watershed Steward Award and opened the voting. She stated the award is seeking to recognize a community member or organization who have helped improve water resources and build community understanding of water issues. Huginin announced that the three nominees received were Kathy Pittelko, Gina Ganno Schmidt, and Joe Coyne. Huginin described the accomplishments of each of the nominees as shared by their nominators.

Huginin asked the TEC to consider how the nominees have been involved in the community, and the public visibility of their pursued projects. She thanked the TEC for participating in the voting process and helping to promote the award in their communities.

The TEC voted and Huginin announced that the most votes went to Gina Ganno Schmidt.

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to confirm the 2025 Watershed Steward Award winner as Gina Ganno Schmidt as determined by vote and to authorize staff to contact the winner and present them with the award.

D. Late Winter/Early Spring Outreach Updates

Hugunin shared the 2025 Adopt a Storm Drain annual report and highlighted some of the statistics. She noted 37 new storm drains were adopted in the watershed, with a total of 292 storm drains adopted within VLAWMO. She said there were 21 new participants who signed up to adopt storm drains and 1,155 lbs of debris collected last year. She stated that compared to previous years, 2025 had the highest debris collection recorded.

Hugunin shared that the majority of storm drain cleanup efforts were completed by individuals. The leading recruiter last year was the State Fair Eco Experience as well as word of mouth.

Hugunin also provided an update on the March 4th Turf Alternatives workshop that was held at the Vadnais Heights City Hall. She noted this workshop topic was selected due to the increased interest staff have seen through the grant programs. She shared that 15 people registered and 13 attended the workshop. She stated the workshop resulted in two site visit request forms for the grant programs being filled out after the workshop.

VI. Projects

A. Update on WMP 90-Day Draft and Upcoming BWSR Meeting

Tanner provided an update that a public hearing was held on the Watershed Management Plan (WMP) 90-day review draft after the TEC's approval last month. She noted no members of the public attended and no comments were received on the WMP at the February 25th public hearing. She said the TEC+ process and community engagement in the WMP likely helped reduce the comments received, since many comments were incorporated in the collaborative development process with the TEC+. She added that Anne Sawyer, a Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Board Conservationist, was present at the public hearing and provided staff assistance throughout the WMP planning process. Tanner said that Anne Sawyer provided samples to assist VLAWMO with development of the presentation to support the WMP at BWSR's Metro meeting on April 6. The presentation draft is currently underway and will be shared with BWSR in advance of the March 19 deadline.

Tanner provided an overview of the next steps for the WMP including the presentation on April 6 and anticipated BWSR Board consideration on April 22nd for final BWSR authorization of the WMP.

B. Update on 319/Wilkinson Lake Phase 2 Project

Tanner provided an update that the Board approved the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and grant contract for the Wilkinson Lake phase 2 project at the February 25th Board meeting. The grant contract has been fully executed with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Tanner noted that the project design is still in progress and will continue to be iterative as the project goes through permitting. She highlighted the conceptual design includes two options- options A and B. She noted the final selection of the options will depend on the result of permitting. She said staff are still working on the draft temporary easement document. HEI is revising figures for the easement, and VLAWMO's attorney is working on text revisions received from VLAWMO on the initial draft.

Tanner described the design components of options A and B. She highlighted that option A is estimated to result in 8.7 pounds of reduced total phosphorus and Option B would result in 11 pounds of reduced total phosphorus. She discussed the potential spoil placement piles that will be needed as part of the project and presented four possible locations. She noted that Minnesota Land Trust has an easement in the project area and will be part of signing the temporary easement document. She said staff hope to have the draft easement document ready for the next TEC meeting in April.

Commissioner Miller asked if there are plans to do water quality monitoring in Wilkinson Lake or the associated wetland restoration projects to determine if all the investment is having an effect. Tanner responded that staff annually monitor Wilkinson Lake as part of the water quality monitoring program. She added that there was additional site-specific monitoring as part of the deep-water wetland project, and site-specific monitoring is also in the budget for the r phase 2 project.

Commissioner Miller recommended making the project impact clear when communicating to the public to help gain support for more projects in the future. Tanner responded that annual differences in a waterbody may be due to conditions of that season such as high or low rainfall. Trends are important to look at over time. VLAWMO will be looking for trends in Wilkinson Lake and signs of improvement especially over the next three to five years.

VII. Commissioner Reports

Alternate Commissioner Hauth reported that the City of Vadnais Heights was notified that the LCCMR project was included in the 2026 legislative bill. The City is hopeful that the project will continue through the legislative process. He added that the City and VLAWMO are currently working on finding additional partners to help fund the project.

VIII. NOHOA

None.

IX. Ramsey Soil & Water Conservation Division (RCSWCD)

None.

X. St. Paul Regional Water Services

None.

XI. Public Comment

None.

XII. Next Meetings

TEC meeting: April 8, 2026 at 8:15 am; Board meeting: April 22, 2026.

XIII. Adjourn

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 am. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.