Vadnais Lake Area Water Management Organization
Technical Commission (TEC) Minutes
September 9, 2026
Vadnais Heights City Hall, Council Chambers
800 County Road E East, Vadnais Heights, MN 55127

Commission Members Present:

Nick Ousky	Vadnais Heights (VH)
Gloria Tessier	Gem Lake (GL)
Susan Miller	North Oaks (NO)
Jami Philip	White Bear Township (WBT)
Terry Huntrods	White Bear Lake (WBL)
Tom Hoffman	Lino Lakes (LL)

Others in attendance: Phil Belfiori, Brian Corcoran, Lauren Sampedro, Angela Hugunin (VLAWMO staff), James Brown (SPRWS).

I. Call to Order

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

II. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Commissioner Tessier and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve the September 9, 2026 TEC agenda as revised with the addition of agenda item V. C. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

III. Approval of Minutes (August 12, 2026)

It was moved by Commissioner Tessier and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve the August 12, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

IV. Administration & Operations

A. September Financial Report and Consider Authorization for Payment

Administrator Belfiori summarized the September financial statement as included in the TEC packet. He highlighted expenditures for insurance with the League of Minnesota Cities as well as continued design work for two Lambert Creek ditch repair projects. Administrator Belfiori recommended approval of the September financial report and payment of the bills.

It was moved by Commissioner Tessier and seconded by Commissioner Huntrods to approve the September financial report and authorize for payment. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

V. Programs

A. Outreach Update: August into September

Hugunin outlined recent outreach efforts, including the Vadnais Heights Family Fun Zone and the August round of Neighborhood Garden Tours. Staff thanked the volunteers who contributed their time and efforts to these events. Hugunin outlined educational efforts from National Water Quality Month, including a short video centered on creek monitoring. Commissioner Miller asked about the drought and its impact on Lambert Creek, which was shown in the video. Hugunin responded that later in the summer, the creek was drier than shown in the video. Sampedro affirmed that multiple points along the creek were dry late in the season.

Hugunin highlighted upcoming event opportunities including a workshop about native garden care, an upcoming Watershed Action Volunteers meeting, and the first event in the series by Minnesota Water Stewards Josie and Caden. She also noted that the Metro Children's Water Festival is still recruiting volunteers for this field day that serves fourth graders across the metro area.

B. SHG 2026-06 Hilpisch Native Plant Restoration Grant Application

Sampedro presented a Soil Health Grant application for a native plant restoration project in Vadnais Heights. She shared the proposed location of the project, 0.7 acres that drains directly to a wetland before ultimately draining to Sucker Lake. Sampedro stated that the proposed project will replace existing invasive species with native plants, and the homeowner has hired a contractor to begin this removal process independently of VLAWMO's grant programs. The homeowner is motivated to reduce stormwater runoff, improve pollinator habitat, and reduce the amount of mowing needed for the area.

Sampedro stated that a variety of shade-tolerant native plants will be added to create a native plant groundcover that outcompetes the invasives. The proposed planting area will be 1,750 square feet. The total estimated project cost is $2,235.00. Staff recommended approval of SHG 2026-06 in the amount of $1,250.

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Huntrods to approve SHG 2026-06 in the amount of $1,250. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.

C. SHG 2026-07 Steffl Native Plant Restoration Application

Sampedro shared a Soil Health Grant application for a native plant restoration project in North Oaks. The property is on 1.5 acres that drains to a wetland which ultimately drains to Gilfillan Lake. Sampedro highlighted proposed changes from the existing project area, noting that woody debris will be removed and planting will occur in existing mulch areas, in addition to the removal of existing sod. The project would involve plantings natives in an area of approximately 600 square feet. Selected species are largely deer resistant. The total estimated project cost is $1,960. Staff recommended approval of SHG 2026-07 in the amount of $1,000.

Sampedro noted that the applicant's decision to pursue a grant was largely motivated by her attending the August neighborhood garden tour event. The applicant shared that she felt inspired by the tour's projects.

It was moved by Commissioner Miller and seconded by Commissioner Philip to approve SHG 2026-07 in the amount of $1,000.00.

D. Smart Irrigation Controller Project Highlights

Sampedro presented an update on smart irrigation controller grant projects. She explained that staff have been collecting water usage information from past smart irrigation controller grant projects over the last three years, noting that the TEC previously approved 10 applications for adding smart irrigation controllers through the Landscape Level 2 Grant program. These grant awards included a requirement for reporting water savings.

Sampedro stated that data was received from seven of the ten projects. Since all the projects were recently installed, data was requested from the years 2024-2025. Sampedro explained that just one year's worth of data illustrates decreased water usage. The highest individual savings from one of the ten projects was approximately 9 million gallons. In total, the seven featured projects saved over 17 million gallons of water from irrigation.

Commissioner Miller asked whether the grantees were generally satisfied with the systems installed. Sampedro responded that, while some grantees have had a learning curve with utilizing the systems, the majority are overall satisfied with the new systems and ease of use.

Commissioner Miller asked whether most of the featured grantees are within the White Bear Township water system. In response, Sampedro pointed out which of the featured projects utilized water from White Bear Township. Commissioner Miller responded that given that the Township is facing pressure to reduce groundwater use, these projects sound like a positive step toward water conservation. Sampedro replied noting that, while a few other smart irrigation controller projects are beyond the White Bear Township area, overall, they all fall within an area that is encouraged to reduce groundwater use in the White Bear Lake zone.

Sampedro stated that cost savings have been another factor that has driven interest in these projects. From the three grantees who reported on their cost savings, a total of $111,522 was saved in irrigation costs in just one year. Staff anticipate that cost savings will continue to be a motivating factor for smart irrigation controller use.

Commissioner Miller asked whether VLAWMO has ever proactively contacted HOAs within its boundaries to share these opportunities now that there is data to share about the impact of these offerings. Sampedro responded that it has historically been challenging to connect directly with HOAs due to a variety of factors, however when staff have been contacted by HOAs about grant programs, the smart irrigation controller information has been shared as an additional opportunity. Sampedro also shared that resources are continuing to be developed by partnership groups throughout the metro area. Staff are continuing to explore the tools that may be available for sharing with HOAs.

Chair Ousky and Commissioner Philip shared that they also have had challenges connecting with the proper representatives from HOAs in their communities given the structure of these organizations and difficulties with finding ways to contact their leadership. This audience faces unique challenges such as not frequently having an online presence. Commissioner Philip noted that it can be difficult to locate stormwater agreements between municipalities and HOAs.

Sampedro shared that she will continue gathering data on these smart irrigation controller projects and will bring updates to the TEC as possible. She also stated that the smart irrigation controllers will continue to be included in the Landscape Level 2 program's offerings in 2027.

E. Grant Projects Revisited: Before and After Photos

Sampedro presented a series of before and after photos from a variety of projects that have gone through VLAWMO's grant programs. She shared that this update was motivated by recent neighborhood garden tour events that have shown significant project updates. She stated that there are often prominent visual differences between how the projects begin and their end results.

Sampedro highlighted project photos from a variety of grant projects throughout the watershed. These included rain gardens and a native prairie. Commissioner Miller asked about the grantee's maintenance practices for the first project—a ten-year old double rain garden. Sampedro responded that this grantee typically leaves all the plants until spring to ensure any maintenance occurs after pollinator hibernation. Then, the grant recipient will cut down the plants to encourage renewed blooms, will weed throughout the year, and has created mulch pathways to improve ease of access to the plants. She also noted that these initial projects visually attract lots of life from pollinators and hummingbirds.

Chair Ousky stated that these projects are good examples of what people can do with native landscapes and they illustrate that these projects can be intentional and well-maintained. Sampedro affirmed that these projects are a reminder of the importance of sharing with grantees that maintenance is essential so that their projects can look nice well into the future.

Sampedro shared further project transformations including low-mow fescue in place of traditional turfgrass, a bee lawn and native plantings, swales, a shoreline restoration, a municipal-level rain garden, curb cut rain gardens at the residential scale, and a prairie restoration at a church. Sampedro stated that it is rewarding to observe how these projects transform over time, particularly when they are well maintained.

VII. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Philip shared that White Bear Township Day will be held on Saturday, September 19th from 2-8pm.

Commissioner Miller shared from North Oaks that she will no longer be on the Technical Commission after this year but will be available as an alternate.

VIII. NOHOA

None.

IX. Ramsey Soil & Water Conservation Division (RCSWCD)

None.

X. St. Paul Regional Water Services

James Brown from SPRWS joined the meeting. No updates to report.

XI. Public Comment

None.

XII. Next Meetings

TEC meeting: October 14, 2026 at 8:15 am; Board meeting: October 28, 2026.

XIII. Adjourn

It was moved by Commissioner Tessier and seconded by Commissioner Philip to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 am. Vote: all aye. Motion passed.