SUMMARY NOTES OF THE MAY 18, 2021 MEETING OF THE OAK CREEK WATERSHED RESTORATION PLAN ADVISORY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Because of the COVID-19 safety protocols, the May 18, 2021 meeting of the Oak Creek Watershed Restoration Plan Advisory Group was held virtually via GoToMeeting. The meeting was called to order at 9:04 a.m. by Laura Herrick, Chief Environmental Engineer, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC). Attendance was noted by SEWRPC staff via the GoToMeeting participant listing.

In attendance at the meeting were the following individuals:

Advisory Group Members Present

Philip Beiermeister ..... Environmental Engineer, City of Oak Creek
Benjamin Benninghoff ..... Natural Resources Basin Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Jacob Fincher..... Executive Director, Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trusts, Inc.
David Giordano..... Executive Director, Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network
Craig Helker ..... Water Resources Management Specialist, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Laura Herrick, Secretary ..... Chief Environmental Engineer, SEWRPC
Stevan Keith..... Principal Environmental Engineer, Milwaukee County Environmental Services
Julie Kinzelman..... Associate Lecturer, Sustainable Management Department, UW Parkside
Janette Marsh..... Nonpoint Source Technical Program Manager, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5
Glen Morrow ..... City Engineer/Director of Public Works, City of Franklin
Cheryl Nenn..... Riverkeeper, Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Tom Slawski ..... Chief Biologist, SEWRPC
Kyle Vandercar..... City Engineer, City of South Milwaukee
Jennifer Wright..... Watercourse Section Manager, Engineering Department Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District

Guests and Staff Present

Megan Beauchaine ..... Planner, SEWRPC
Joseph Boxhorn..... Principal Planner, SEWRPC
Erik Brooks..... Mayor, City of South Milwaukee
Timothy Detzer..... Senior Environmental Engineer, Milwaukee County Environmental Services
James Mahoney..... Engineer, SEWRPC
Mark Mittag..... Senior Project Manager, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
Julia Orlowski..... Engineer, SEWRPC
Aaron Owens..... Senior Planner, SEWRPC
Kevin Shafer..... Executive Director, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
Sarah Toomsen..... Manager of Planning and Development, Milwaukee County Parks
Jacob Zimmerman..... Water Resources Engineer, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Ms. Herrick welcomed all attendees to the sixth meeting of the Advisory Group for the Oak Creek Watershed Restoration Plan (Plan). Ms. Herrick began the meeting with a brief explanation of features of the GoToMeeting platform. Ms. Herrick briefly reviewed the agenda for the meeting, which included

review of the summary notes from the November 2020 Advisory Group meeting, review of the portion of Chapter 6 regarding alternatives and recommendations for the Mill Pond dam, and discussion of the next steps for the Plan development.

CONSIDERATION OF THE SUMMARY NOTES OF THE NOVEMBER 17,2020, ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

No edits or changes were offered by the attendees for the summary notes from the November 17, 2020, Advisory Group meeting. Ms. Herrick informed attendees that SEWRPC will be accepting comments and edits for the November 2020 summary notes until May 21, 2021.

REVIEW OF THE MILL POND AND DAM PORTION OF CHAPTER 6, "PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS"

Ms. Herrick began with a brief overview of the Plan sections "Introduction", "Existing Conditions", and "Hydraulic Model Development". There were no comments or questions on these sections from attendees.

Ms. Herrick continued with a review of the section "Issues of Concern". Mayor Brooks asked the Advisory Group for a qualitative assessment of the need and importance of restoring the Mill Pond and dam area relative to other ponds in the Milwaukee County Parks system and the Region. Ms. Herrick responded that it is difficult to compare this location to other nearby facilities, but the Mill Pond and dam area is in urgent need of restoration due to significant accumulation of sediment that has degraded its use. Mr. Boxhorn responded that completing work on this area is high priority because currently the sluice gate system is nonoperational, and it must be fixed per WDNR order. He added that the level of contamination in the pond sediment is unknown and more sediment core sampling is necessary to determine the level of contamination. Mr. Helker added that he conducted some limited sampling of the top one to two feet of sediment in the Mill Pond several years ago, and that deeper soil core sampling would give a more complete assessment of the sediment quality over time.

Mr. Keith stated that Milwaukee County maintains many ponds and lagoons and many of them have sediment deposition, but the Oak Creek Mill Pond differs somewhat because it has a dam, which causes more substantial sedimentation.

Mr. Giordano noted that additional funding opportunities may become available if fish passage is incorporated into the design for the Mill Pond and dam area. Ms. Nenn agreed with this and added that she spent some time in the Oak Creek area monitoring sucker migration and she noticed that there is intense fishing pressure between the dam and the outlet at Lake Michigan, and that improving fish passage could allow more fishing activity to spread further upstream.

Ms. Marsh recommended that text be added to Chapter 6 to reiterate that as the headwaters continue to urbanize and add impervious area, sedimentation in the downstream area of the watershed will continue to be an issue unless upper watershed projects included in this plan are also implemented.

> [Secretary's Note: The following text has been added to the end of the Recommended Actions section to address this. "It should be noted that as the Oak Creek watershed continues to urbanize and add impervious area, sediment delivery and water quality to the Mill Pond area will continue to be an issue unless the recommended projects listed in previous sections of this plan are also implemented."]

Ms. Herrick next reviewed the section "Historical Restoration Planning Effort" and described the main features of the design plans created for Friends of the Mill Pond in 2004. Ms. Herrick pointed out some limitations that would make some of the features infeasible. There were no comments or questions on these sections from attendees.

Ms. Herrick reviewed the section "Design and Cost Assumptions" which describes the assumptions that were used when developing different alternatives to restore the Mill Pond and dam area. Mr. Detzer asked whether the alternative costs assumed that PFAS testing would be necessary for the sediment core sampling. Mr. Mahoney confirmed that PFAS testing was assumed to be necessary and was included in the sediment core testing costs in Table 6.Mill-1. There were no further comments or questions on this section from attendees.

Ms. Herrick reviewed the features included in section "Alternative 1 – Sluice Gate Repair" which involves repairing the sluice gate system just south of the dam. This is the minimum necessary work to bring the Mill Pond dam into compliance with WDNR requirements. There were no comments or questions on this alternative from attendees.

Ms. Herrick next reviewed the features in section "Optional Spillway Capacity Enhancements" which includes two optional features that could be added to Alternatives 1, 2, or 3 to improve the spillway capacity of the Mill Pond dam. One of these options is an emergency spillway culvert that would pass under Mill Road to the north of the dam, and the other option is an extension of the dam abutment walls. Ms. Nenn voiced concern about the velocities of the flow in the emergency spillway, which would discharge to a popular fishing spot. Ms. Herrick replied that the flows and velocities from the large culvert could pose a safety hazard during large flood events and that Commission staff will look into adding text to the Plan for this. There were no further comments or questions on this section from attendees.

[Secretary's Note: The following sentence was added to the Optional Spillway section. "Additional erosion protection for the channel downstream of the dam may be necessary to maintain streambank integrity, however this was not included in the cost estimates."]

Ms. Herrick reviewed the features in section "Alternative 2 – Partial Pond Restoration" which involves dredging the southern portion of the Mill Pond, and an option to fill the northern lobe of the Mill Pond with the dredged material. She also reviewed the features in section "Alternative 3 – Full Pond Restoration", which involves a complete dredging of the Mill Pond to return it to the 1930s design. There were no comments or questions on these sections from attendees.

Ms. Herrick next reviewed the features in section "Alternative 4 – Bypass Channel, Dam Lowering, and Pond Restoration" which includes creating a bypass channel along the northern edge of the pond, building a weir to divert flows to the bypass channel, slightly lowering the crest of the dam, and dredging the pond area. Ms. Nenn expressed concern about potential erosion issues at the outlet of the bypass channel during high flow events. Ms. Herrick responded that text will be added to the Plan to address this concern. There were no further comments or questions on this section from attendees.

[Secretary's Note: The following sentence was added to the Alternative 4 section. "Additional erosion protection for the channel downstream of the dam may be necessary to

maintain streambank integrity, however this was not included in the cost estimates."]

Mayor Brooks inquired whether fish passage was included in any of the Alternatives that retained the dam. Ms. Herrick responded that options for a fishway were investigated for the alternatives that left the dam in place, however due to topography and other characteristics of the area, it was determined that a fishway to circumvent the dam was not feasible.

Ms. Herrick reviewed the features in section "Alternative 5 – Dam Removal and Channel Restoration", which involves removing the dam, creating a stepped riffle-pool system, and dredging sediment to widen the floodplain. She explained that Alternative 5 includes options for a wider or narrower floodplain area and options for sediment removal. The sediment removal options include hauling sediment material away, using some as fill, or allowing some sediment material to be removed by naturally flowing downstream. Mayor Brooks inquired about how fishing conditions were expected to change for reaches of Oak Creek upstream of the current Mill Pond under Alternative 5. Mr. Slawski replied that there are some additional fish passage impediments further upstream but migrating fish would likely be able to swim as far upstream as potentially to the confluence with the North Branch of Oak Creek if the Mill Pond dam was removed. Mayor Brooks also commented that any additional photos of similar real-world projects would be useful to help the public understand what Alternative 5 might look like after it is completed.

[Secretary's Note: Additional example photos were included in the stakeholder meeting presentation.]

Ms. Nenn commented that it would not be desirable to use riprap for the riffle-pool design. Ms. Herrick clarified that rounded boulders and river rock were envisioned and included in the cost estimate.

Mr. Giordano suggested that we list the costs more directly in the positives/drawbacks for future presentations, since high costs can be a significant drawback to an alternative. Ms. Herrick responded that the planning level costs may be moved up into the main discussion of each alternative for the stakeholder meeting.

[Secretary's Note: Costs were moved up in the presentation for the stakeholders meeting.]

Mayor Brooks asked about whether it would be possible for boating to occur on the Mill Pond in the future. Ms. Toomsen responded that the current rules do not allow boating on the Milwaukee County ponds, but that the issue could be revisited in the future. Ms. Toomsen noted that the activities of Milwaukee County Parks are constrained by budget and staffing, but the County would like to look at all future projects from a triple bottom line perspective (cost-social-environment). Mayor Brooks indicated that while he understands there are real budget constraints and that budget will play a significant role in making any plan a reality, he would not want options and ideas to restore the Mill Pond area to be limited at this point in the planning process solely by budget constraints. Mayor Brooks added that the Mill Pond restoration project may have additional funding available from various sources in addition to funding from Milwaukee County Parks.

Mr. Giordano commented that Root-Pike WIN considers an improvement at the Mill Pond as a top priority and would be willing to help find the necessary funding to get the preferred project completed when it is

selected. He also expressed concern about the Alternative 5 options that release some sediment downstream, since that release could cause an issue at the Oak Creek mouth at Lake Michigan and in the Lake itself.

Mr. Keith mentioned that ice skating seemed common when he first moved to Milwaukee, but recently there have been more ordinances prohibiting it. He asked whether ice skating would be allowed in a restored Mill Pond area. Mr. Keith added that still water tends to freeze more easily than moving water, and for that reason the small skating pond option for Alternative 5 might provide safer ice skating conditions than the larger pond area included in the other alternatives, and he suggested that it may be worth noting this in the text. Ms. Toomsen responded that generally the Parks department authorizes skating when there is a local partner group to help run the ice skating area and do daily checks of the ice, which she believes is currently the case for the Mill Pond. There were no further comments or questions on the Alternative 5 section from attendees.

Ms. Herrick reviewed Table 6.Mill-2 which includes the planning level construction and maintenance costs for each alternative. Ms. Nenn recommended that the table provide more clarity between Alternatives 5A and 5B, as they were described with the same title. Ms. Herrick agreed and said that the table will be updated to better differentiate these two alternatives. No further comments or questions were given for Table 6.Mill-2 from attendees.

[Secretary's Note: Additional notes were added to the Alternative 5 descriptions the cost table included in the stakeholder meeting presentation.]

Ms. Herrick next discussed the sections "Evaluation of Alternatives", "Summary" and Table 6.Mill-4 that compared the five planning level alternatives for their ability to improve flooding, the environment, and recreational opportunities. Mr. Giordano asked whether any distinction was made between different types of habitat creation in the comparison analysis, because a wetland habitat area could potentially allow more sources of grant funding and could have additional water quality benefits. Ms. Herrick stated that wording could be added to the Plan to better specify the types of habitat envisioned.

[Secretary's Note: Additional clarification was added to the Alternative 5 text to identify wetland versus prairie habitat restoration potential.]

Ms. Nenn commented that she believed Alternative 5 has a substantial improvement in habitat compared to Alternative 4, and that additional fishing recreation upstream of the Mill Pond is a notable advantage of Alternative 5. Mr. Giordano mentioned that birding is a popular recreational activity and that including migratory bird stopover features might qualify the Mill Pond restoration project for additional grant funding.

Mayor Brooks asked about the potential to add nature trails to Alternative 5. Ms. Herrick responded that there were concerns that a flood event might bury any trails built in the low floodplain area of Alternative 5. Ms. Herrick stated that these alternatives were developed as planning level designs and that trails and features to support birds could be incorporated into the final preferred design. There were no further comments or questions on the Alternative 5 section from attendees.

Ms. Herrick lastly discussed the "Recommended Actions" section of the partial chapter. She explained that sediment core testing throughout the pond would be necessary to determine the level of contamination in the pond sediment, which would determine how sediment could be removed from the Mill Pond. Ms. Herrick also explained that a sediment transport study would help to estimate how quickly a restored pond area would refill with sediment in the future. She also explained that if it is determined that dam removal will not be pursued, the sluice gate system repair effort could begin because that work is required by WDNR.

Mr. Giordano asked about whether the socio-economic regions of the watershed had been discussed in previous chapters of the Plan or would be incorporated into the Plan in Chapter 6. He stated that he believed it was important to include this assessment to better understand how the watershed restoration plan would affect underserved communities. Mr. Giordano added that some grant programs include socio-economic factors when assessing projects and awarding grants. Ms. Herrick answered that there is currently no socio-economic impact evaluation in the Plan, and she asked how the socio-economic status of residents could be quantified. Mayor Brooks suggested that census data could be used, and Ms. Marsh added that U.S. EPA has a screening tool to assess socio-economic factors, and that she would be willing to provide more information.

[Secretary's Note: An Environmental Justice discussion has been added to section 6.1 of the text. This section will be discussed at the next Advisory Group meeting.]

UPCOMING STAKEHOLDER MEETING

Ms. Herrick explained that the upcoming virtual stakeholder meeting will be held in a similar format as this meeting, via GoToMeeting on June 23, 2021 from 6:00 to 7:00 pm. She added that the stakeholder meeting will include a similar review of the Mill Pond and dam section of Chapter 6.

NEXT STEPS FOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Herrick requested that the Advisory Group provide any additional comments or edits related to the Mill Pond and dam section of Chapter 6 by May 28, 2021. She indicated that SEWRPC staff continue to work to complete Chapter 6, with the goal of completing the entire Oak Creek Watershed Restoration Plan document in 2021.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 10:36 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Herrick
Recording Secretary

#257828 – CAPR-330 Summary Notes for May 18 2021 Advisory Meeting
300-4010
AWO/JEB/LKH/JCO
5/24/21, 6/1/21, 6/2/21, 7/16/21