



# LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

## Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

### **Agenda Item**

#### **Item 7. A. - LMRWD Communication Policy**

### **Prepared By**

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### **Summary**

President Barisonzi asked that the LMRWD develop a policy for communications. His request for a policy would guide the LMRWD when communicating news and position on issues. Further it would define criteria for determining when it is appropriate for the Board to speak collectively on behalf of an issue.

President Barisonzi's suggested policies, for communication and advocacy are attached.

In addition, I researched communication policies of other public bodies, such as cities, watershed management organizations and the League of Minnesota Cities. An amalgam of those policies was adapted for the LMRWD and is attached as an example of what other public bodies have in place.

### **Attachments**

Suggested Communication Policy

Suggested Advocacy Policy

Draft Communication Policy

### **Recommended Action**

No action recommended

# Lower Minnesota River Watershed District

## Communications Policy

### I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD) Board to thoughtfully and responsibly communicate news and stance on issues. The policy aims to define the criteria for determining when it is appropriate for the Board to speak collectively on behalf of an issue.

### II. Principles

The LMRWD Board acknowledges the importance of representing the interests and concerns of the community within the watershed. The following principles will guide the Board's communication efforts:

- 1. Mission Alignment:** Communication efforts should primarily align with the mission and goals of the LMRWD, focusing on protecting and enhancing the water resources within the district. However, the Board may also consider communicating on news or issues outside of the district that significantly impact the water resources within the district.
- 2. Transparency:** For the communications aspect, transparency means reporting on the communications that have been made. All discussions of the positions that the Board has taken have happened at public meetings with opportunities for public input. This policy authorizes the Board, via the President and Administrator, to act in alignment with Board direction between meetings.
- 3. Informed Decision-Making:** Decisions to advocate for or against an issue should be based on thorough research, consideration of relevant facts, and understanding of potential impacts.
- 4. Non-Partisanship:** The LMRWD Board shall remain non-partisan in its communication efforts, prioritizing the well-being of the watershed above political affiliations.

### III. Types of Communications

The Board may choose to speak collectively on four types of issues:

- 1. Issues that Have Followed the Board Process:** Issues that have been brought before the Board and followed the established process as defined by the Advocacy Policy.

**2. Issues in Alignment with Board Actions:** Communications in alignment with actions taken by the Board, such as supporting projects funded by the Board or advocating for legislation within the legislative agenda.

**3. Immediate Situations Response:** Communications in response to immediate situations, such as the newsworthy nature of a flood that has breached a levee, consistent with our plan and policies.

**4. General Business and News:** Communications about the appointments, actions, or general business of the Board.

## **V. Communication Strategies**

When the Board determines to communicate, tailored strategies will be developed to effectively convey the stance on different types of issues to the public, stakeholders, and relevant authorities. The choice of communication channels will depend on the nature of the message and the type of communication. Strategies may encompass, but are not limited to, the following:

### **1. Issues that Have Followed the Board Process**

For communications related to issues that have followed the established Board process, consider utilizing detailed newsletters, press releases, and targeted social media posts. These channels provide an in-depth exploration of the process and outcomes.

### **2. Issues in Alignment with Board Actions**

Communications aligned with Board actions, such as support for funded projects or legislative advocacy, may benefit from press releases, editorials, and engaging social media posts. These channels help highlight the impact and significance of Board-supported initiatives.

### **3. Immediate Situations Response**

In response to immediate situations, such as floods or emergencies, prioritize timely and concise communication. Utilize rapid press releases, urgent social media updates, and direct community engagement through newsletters to ensure swift dissemination of critical information.

### **4. General Business and News**

Communications related to general business and news about the Board can be effectively conveyed through regular newsletters, press releases, and ongoing social media updates. These channels maintain transparency and keep the community informed about the Board's activities.

Regardless of the type of communication, all information will be promptly posted on the LMRWD website at [[www.lmrwd.org](http://www.lmrwd.org)]([www.lmrwd.org](http://www.lmrwd.org)). The Board will carefully consider the nature of each issue and select communication channels that are most suitable for delivering the message effectively and ensuring community engagement.

## **VI. Authorized Communication**

The President and the Administrator, by mutual decision, are authorized to communicate on behalf of the Board on issues in accordance with this policy. All communications must be drafted in accordance with the Open Meeting Law and will be shared with the full board at the next public meeting. Open Meeting Law requires the President and Administrator to inform the Board of all ongoing communications at the official monthly meeting.

## **VII. Review and Revision**

This policy will be periodically reviewed, at least once every two years, to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Amendments may be proposed and adopted as needed to adapt to changing circumstances or community needs.

## **VIII. Adoption**

This Communications Policy shall be adopted by the LMRWD Board through a majority vote and will become effective upon adoption.

# Lower Minnesota River Watershed District

## Advocacy Policy

### I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD) Board to take a stand on specific issues thoughtfully and responsibly. The policy aims to define the criteria for determining when it is appropriate for the Board to speak collectively on behalf of an issue.

### II. Principles

The LMRWD Board acknowledges the importance of representing the interests and concerns of the community within the watershed. The following principles will guide the Board's advocacy and communication efforts:

- 1. Mission Alignment:** Advocacy efforts should primarily align with the mission and goals of the LMRWD, focusing on protecting and enhancing the water resources within the district. However, the Board may also consider taking a stand on issues outside of the district that significantly impact the water resources within the district.
- 2. Transparency and Open Meeting Law Compliance:** The process of taking a stand on an issue shall be conducted with full transparency, adhering to all Open Meeting Law requirements. This involves clear communication with stakeholders and the community, ensuring that all discussions and decisions related to advocacy efforts are conducted in accordance with applicable legal standards.
- 3. Informed Decision-Making:** Decisions to advocate for or against an issue should be based on thorough research, consideration of relevant facts, and understanding of potential impacts.
- 4. Non-Partisanship:** The LMRWD Board shall remain non-partisan in its advocacy efforts, prioritizing the well-being of the watershed above political affiliations.

### III. Criteria for Advocacy

The Board will consider the following criteria before taking a collective stand on an issue:

- 1. Direct Relevance:** The issue must directly impact the water resources or overall environmental health of the Lower Minnesota River Watershed.

- 2. Consensus:** The Board will seek to reach a consensus on whether to advocate for or against an issue. If consensus is not achievable, the Board may choose to remain neutral.
- 3. Legal and Ethical Considerations:** The proposed advocacy stance should comply with all relevant laws and ethical standards.
- 4. Community Impact:** The Board will assess the potential impact of the advocacy stance on the community and stakeholders within the watershed.

#### **IV. Advocacy Process**

The Board recognizes the importance of a systematic process for advocating on specific issues. The following steps will be followed when engaging in advocacy:

- 1. Initiation:** Any Board member or stakeholder can propose an advocacy initiative. Proposals should be submitted in writing and include relevant information about the issue.
- 2. Review and Research:** The Board will conduct a thorough review and research process to understand the issue, its implications, and potential courses of action.
- 3. Public Input:** The Board will seek input from the community and stakeholders through public forums, hearings, or other engagement methods. The timeframe for public input should be specified for each advocacy initiative.
- 4. Decision-Making:** The Board will decide on whether to advocate for or against the issue based on the information gathered, consensus reached, and alignment with the established criteria.

#### **V. Public Input Strategies**

Public input is crucial in shaping the Board's advocacy efforts. The following strategies may be employed to gather public input:

- 1. Public Forums:** Organize public forums to allow community members to express their opinions and concerns on the advocacy issue. Specify the timeframe for public forums.
- 2. Surveys:** Utilize surveys to collect feedback from a wider audience and ensure diverse perspectives are considered.

3. **Stakeholder Meetings:** Engage with key stakeholders through targeted meetings to gather input from groups directly affected by the advocacy issue.

#### **VI. Authorized Communication Process**

Communication of a Board position approved under this policy must be done in accordance with the Board Communications Policy. Provide details on the steps involved in the Authorized Communication Process, including responsibilities, collaboration between the President and Administrator, and the approval process.

#### **VII. Review and Revision**

This policy will be periodically reviewed, at least once every two years, to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Amendments may be proposed and adopted as needed to adapt to changing circumstances or community needs.

#### **VIII. Adoption**

This Advocacy Policy shall be adopted by the LMRWD Board through a majority vote and will become effective upon adoption.

## Lower Minnesota River Watershed District

### Draft Communications, Social Media, Email and Text Message Guidelines

February 21, 2024

#### **PURPOSE**

The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD) strives to provide the public with accurate and timely information, communicated in a professional manner, and in accordance with laws regarding public information and data practices.

This policy provides guidelines for all external communications from the LMRWD using various mediums including:

- Printed materials such as newsletters, articles, and brochures.
- Electronic materials, such as email, postings to web sites or social media sites.
- Media relations such as requests interviews, news releases, and media inquiries
- LMRWD owned signs.

The LMRWD recognizes that appointed officials, representatives, or consulting professionals hereinafter (“LMRWD Representatives”) may sometimes comment on LMRWD matters outside of official roles. Therefore, this policy provides guidelines for LMRWD representatives when commenting as a private citizen on matters pertaining to LMRWD business.

#### **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS (OFFICIAL AND PERSONAL)**

All LMRWD Representatives have a responsibility to help communicate accurate and timely information to the public in a professional manner. If any mistakes are noticed or suspected in the information communicated to the public, such mistakes shall be brought to the attention of the LMRWD Administrator. Regardless of whether the communication is in the LMRWD Representatives’ official role or in a personal capacity, LMRWD Representatives must comply with all laws related to trademark, copyright, software use, etc. Examples include:

- **Mission Alignment.** Communications should align with the mission, goals, and strategies of the LMRWD Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan or other communications approved by the Board of Managers.
- **Data Practices Policy.** LMRWD Representatives cannot disclose private or confidential information and must route data practices requests to the responsible authority. LMRWD Representatives are also bound by the LMRWD Data Practices Policy with respect to access to data in the LMRWD’s Possession. This policy should be reviewed and complied with in full.
- **Respectful Workplace.** LMRWD representatives cannot publish information that is discriminatory, harassing, threatening or sexually explicit.
- **Political Activity Policy.** LMRWD representatives cannot participate in personal political activity while discharging LMRWD responsibilities. No LMRWD Representative may act in a manner that suggests that the LMRWD either supports or opposes a particular candidate or political issue, or endorses the personal political opinions of the LMRWD Representative.



## **ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR OFFICIAL LMRWD COMMUNICATIONS**

### **LMRWD Website**

All Submissions for the LMRWD website must be directly related to a program or project of the LMRWD or promote LMRWD activities, public information and LMRWD sponsored events. Submission must be approved by the LMRWD Administrator. Outside groups or agencies requesting submissions into the LMRWD website may only be allowed to do so if the request is directly related to a current LMRWD program or project.

### **Handling General Requests**

All LMRWD Representatives are responsible for communicating basic and routine information to the public in relation to their specific duties. Requests for private data or information outside the scope of an individual's job duties should be routed to the data practices compliance official.

### **Handling Media Requests**

Except for routine events and basic information that is readily available to the public, all requests for interviews or information from the media shall be routed through the LMRWD Administrator. Media requests include anything intended to be published or viewable to others in some form such as television, radio, newspapers, newsletters, and websites. When responding to media requests LMRWD Representatives should follow these steps:

1. If the request is for routine or public information (such as meeting time or agenda) provide the information and notify the LMRWD Administrator of the request.
2. If the request is regarding information about LMRWD personnel, potential litigation, controversial issues, an opinion on a LMRWD matter or if you are unsure if it is a "routine" question, forward the request to the LMRWD Administrator. An appropriate response would be "I'm sorry, I don't have the full information regarding that issue. Let me take some basic information and submit your request to the appropriate person who will get back to you as soon as he/she can."
3. Ask the media representative's name, questions deadline and contact information. Then share the information with the LMRWD Administrator.

### **Communicating on behalf of the LMRWD**

The LMRWD Administrator is to communicate on behalf of the LMRWD in interviews, publications, news releases, on social media sites and related communications. Other LMRWD Representatives may represent the LMRWD if approved by the Board of Managers to communicate on a specific topic. When speaking on behalf of the LMRWD:

- The person speaking must identify themselves as representing the LMRWD. Account names on social media sites must clearly be connected to the LMRWD and approved by the LMRWD Board of Managers.
- All information must be respectful, professional, and truthful. Corrections must be issued when needed.
- Personal opinions generally do not belong in official statements. One exception is communications related to promoting a LMRWD project, or initiative. LMRWD Representatives

who have been approved to use social media sites on behalf of the LMRWD should seek assistance from the LMRWD Administrator on this topic.

- The Board of Managers must be informed of communications made on behalf of the LMRWD.
- LMRWD Representatives should be aware that data transmitted or stored using personal technology (cell phones, home computers, cameras, etc) for LMRWD business should be aware that data transmitted or stored may be subject to the data practices act.

### **ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS**

It is important for LMRWD representatives to remember that the personal communications of LMRWD Representatives may reflect on the LMRWD especially if LMRWD Representatives are commenting on LMRWD business. The following guidelines apply to personal communications including various forms such as social media (Facebook X, Blogs, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) letter to the editor of newspaper, and personal endorsements.

- Remember that what you write is public and will be so for a long time. It may also be spread to large audiences. Use common sense when using email or social media sites. It is a good idea to refrain from sending or posting information that you would not want your boss or other LMRWD Representative to read, or that you would be embarrassed to see in the newspaper.
- The LMRWD expects LMRWD Representatives to be truthful, courteous and respectful towards other Managers, citizens, consultants, partners, state agencies and others associated with the LMRWD. Do not engage in name-calling or personal attacks.
- While every individual has a right to speak out on the issues facing the community, state, and nation, LMRWD Representatives must take great care to make it clear that their personal opinions are their own and do not represent the official policy position of the LMRWD.
- LMRWD resources, working time or official LMRWD positions cannot be used for personal profit or business interests, or to participate in personal political activity.
- Personal social media account names or email names should not be tied to the LMRWD.

### **LMRWD SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

To comply with the Data Practices Act, LMRWD Social Media Sites should be set up by an authorized LMRWD Representative. Comments and replies may be deactivated. This eliminates the need for constant monitoring of offensive or negative comments and provides easier compliance with data practices regulations. All accounts shall provide a contact email where comments and questions are to be directed.

All posts, comments and replies on any official social media account of the LMRWD are subject to the data practices and records retention policies.

### **EMAIL RETENTION GUIDELINES**

Emails may contain information that qualifies as an official government record. These emails and any attached electronic documents must be kept in accordance with the LMRWD's record retention schedule. For example, an email from a citizen to the LMRWD Administrator complaining about violations of LMRWD rules on a neighbor's property is a government record. Pursuant to the General Records Retention Schedule for Minnesota Cities, it must be maintained for 7 years. However, the subject matter of most LMRWD emails does not qualify as a government record. Transitory or personal

emails should generally be deleted when they are no longer needed. Duplicate copies generally do not qualify as official government records.

Emails that do not qualify as government records do not need to be retained according to a record retention schedule. There are good reasons to dispose of emails and other electronic documents when they are no longer needed. Emails take up memory and affect the efficient operations of computers. Even if emails are not government records, they are still considered data under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act and would have to be produced in response to a data practices request. Emails not qualifying as official government records should be deleted on a regular basis.

#### **TEXT MESSAGING GUIDELINES**

If LMRWD officials use text messages for official government business, their text messages may be official government records subject to records management laws. Text messages are also government data and subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.

#### **QUESTIONS**

Questions related to this policy should be directed to the LMRWD Administrator.