



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting
Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Agenda Item

Item 9. C. – State of the Minnesota River Listening Session

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

LMRWD staff met with President Barisonzi to plan for the listening session. Young Environmental has prepared a Technical Memorandum to inform the Board of the planning activities. The Technical Memorandum is attached.

President Barisonzi has asked that a committee be formed to help plan the event. So far, it has only been President Barisonzi and staff.

A draft "Invitation to Testify" has been prepared by President Barisonzi and is attached for the Board's review.

Attachments

Technical Memorandum – LMRWD Flood/Public Listening Session Update dated October 3, 2024
Invitation to Testify

Recommended Action

Provide feedback to plan and appoint committee members

Technical Memorandum



To: Linda Loomis, Administrator
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD)

From: Della Schall Young, CPESC, PMP, CTF, Principal Scientist

CC: Joseph Barisonzi, President; LMRWD Board of Managers
Suzy Lindberg, Communications Manager, Young Environmental

Date: October 3, 2024

Re: LMRWD Flood/Public Listening Session Update – Board Action Requested

On Wednesday, September 25, 2024, President Barisonzi, Linda Loomis, LMRWD Administrator, and Della Schall Young and Suzy Lindberg, Young Environmental, met to discuss the logistics of organizing an upcoming event for public engagement. After thorough research and consideration of constraints, President Barisonzi directed the team to move forward with January 8, 2025, as the date for the event.

The team aims to select the venue on or before October 9, 2024. Subsequently, initial “save the dates” will be emailed to participants on or before October 11, 2024. These steps are crucial to ensure a smooth planning process and ample participation from all stakeholders.

The meeting summary follows for your consideration.

SUMMARY

In the meeting we focused on the logistics of organizing an upcoming event for public engagement, tentatively planned for January 2025. The goals include clarifying details about the event’s structure, securing board approval for various logistical elements, and fostering collaboration with stakeholders, including county representatives and subject matter experts.

Key Discussion Points

Event Goals and Purpose

- The event is a listening session aimed at gathering testimony and devising solutions for identified problems related to floodplain management and climate impact mitigation.
- The event’s emphasis is on including both expert testimony and public input to avoid “echo chambers” and provide diverse perspectives.
- The event’s outcome will be used to inform the LMRWD legislative agenda for 2025.

Event Structure

- Three thematic blocks for the event were agreed upon:
 - Causes of flooding and climate change impacts.

- Storage and natural mitigation.
- Financial components.

Public testimony will be organized to respond to these themes, and experts will be invited to focus on solutions and actionable recommendations.

Timing and Scheduling

- The event is tentatively scheduled for January 8, 2025.
- Suggested timeline is a 12-4 PM session.
- Discussion about balancing evening and day options to accommodate different participants (professionals and volunteers).
- Potential hybrid event format with online and in-person participation.

Venue Considerations

- We identified the need for a venue that can accommodate approximately 75 people, is within district boundaries, and supports hybrid technology.
- We discussed several venue options, including local council chambers, wildlife refuges, and colleges.
- Securing a venue for January 8, 2025 is the highest priority.

Logistics for Speakers

- **Invitations:** Specific invitations will be extended to key stakeholders, subject matter experts, county representatives, and other interested parties. A call for submissions will also be open to attain broad representation. The "Invitation to Testify" will be distributed without further delay, providing full details of the themes (flooding causes, natural mitigation, and financial components) so participants can prepare meaningful testimony.
- **Presentation Requirements:** Speakers are expected to submit their presentations ahead of time for review. Presentations should focus on solutions and actionable recommendations rather than reiterating prior discussions.
- **Time Allocation:** Each speaker will have a set time for their testimony, followed by a brief Q&A session. Public testimony will be divided into thematic blocks, and additional time will be allocated for spontaneous public contributions at the end of each segment.
- **Technical Support:** Speakers will be provided with technical support to ensure that their presentations run smoothly. AV requirements will be reviewed, and hybrid participation options will be available.

Engagement Strategy

- Emphasis on targeted invites to experts, counties, and other stakeholders, supplemented with grassroots outreach. This will include engagement through the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), the Technical Advisory Board, and community organizations representing historically underrepresented groups.

- County Board participation is crucial for the success of this session. Tailored invitations, pre-event briefings, and direct outreach will be explored to ensure full engagement from county representatives.

Next Steps

- Detailed timeline will be developed, including securing a venue, finalizing invitations, and other logistics.
- Draft agenda and timeline for the event.
- Finalize the date for board approval.
- Develop invitations and communications materials.
- Compile budget requirements for the event, covering AV support, venue, and any associated outreach.

Action Items

- Joseph:
 - Prepare a draft of the "Invitation to Testify" memo for timely distribution. (*Done*)
- Linda:
 - Assist in identifying potential venues that meet event requirements (*Target date October 9, 2024*).
 - Reach out to local venues regarding availability, cost, and AV capabilities (*Target date October 9, 2024*).
- Young Environmental:
 - Compile meeting notes and develop a draft agenda and timeline for the event (*In progress, Targeting October 11*).
 - Identify potential dates for the listening session in January, with emphasis on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, avoiding conflicts. (*Done*)
 - Begin drafting an initial budget estimate covering all potential costs. (*Underway Venue Dependent*)
 - Review lessons learned from past events and apply those to registration and logistical planning for the listening session. (*Done*)
 - Start researching and refining the registration process. (*Underway*)

To: Community Partners and Stakeholders of the Minnesota River
From: Joseph Barisonzi, Linda Loomis, and Della Schall Young
Date: [Insert Date]
Subject: Invitation to Testify at the Minnesota River Public Listening Session

Dear Community Partners and Stakeholders,

We invite you to participate in a critical Public Listening Session that addresses the persistent flooding issues within the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD). Your insights and expertise are invaluable, and your contributions will play a key role in helping us identify actionable solutions that we can implement to mitigate flooding and its impacts.

The LMRWD is focused on gathering testimony that provides clear recommendations for actions that we, as a governing body, can take. This includes, but is not limited to, policy changes, legislative initiatives we should advocate for, projects we should fundraise to support, and programs we should develop. Your participation is crucial as we work together to protect the health and resilience of the Minnesota River and the surrounding communities.

Event Details:

Date: [Insert Date]
Time: 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Location: [Insert Venue, ensuring it supports hybrid participation]

Purpose of the Session:

The session will focus on collecting diverse testimonies from community leaders, experts, and residents regarding the flooding in the LMRWD. We are particularly interested in hearing your feedback on themes such as the scientific causes of flooding, climate change impacts, natural mitigation strategies, and the financial costs of flooding.

Your testimony will be instrumental in shaping the LMRWD's legislative agenda for 2025. By offering your perspective, you will help direct resources and partnerships toward sustainable, long-term solutions for our watershed.

How You Can Contribute:

We are accepting both written and oral testimonies. Written testimonies will be part of the official record, and select individuals will be invited to present their testimonies publicly during the session. Oral testimony is limited to five minutes and should focus on actionable solutions that our board can implement.

Guidelines for Testimony Submission:

To ensure your testimony is impactful, we have prepared Testimony Guidelines (attached). These guidelines outline the preferred structure for written testimonies, key themes we are focusing on, and specific expectations for oral presentations. Please review these guidelines carefully to prepare your submission.

Next Steps:

1. Prepare Your Testimony: Thoughtfully plan your testimony, building on the attached guidelines and emphasizing solutions.
 2. Submit Written Testimony: Please submit your written testimony by [Insert Deadline] to [Insert Email Address].
 3. RSVP: Confirm your participation and indicate if you are willing to present orally by [Insert RSVP Deadline] to [Insert Email Address or RSVP Link].
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Hybrid Participation:

While we encourage in-person attendance for those delivering oral testimony, we welcome virtual attendees to observe the session. If you plan to join remotely, please register in advance via Zoom. Please note that we will not be accepting oral testimony from virtual participants, but written testimony will be welcomed.

Your involvement is critical to shaping the future of the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. Together, we can implement solutions that will protect our communities and our environment from the impacts of flooding. We look forward to hearing your recommendations and working collaboratively toward a more resilient future.

Thank you for your time and commitment.

Sincerely,
Joseph Barisonzi, President
Linda Loomis, Administrator

Della Schall Young, Principal Scientist
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District

Attachment: Testimony Guidelines

Testimony Guidelines for the Public Listening Session

Purpose of the Testimonies:

The LMRWD is seeking concrete recommendations for actions we can take, including but not limited to:

- **Policy changes** we should implement
- **Legislative initiatives** we should lobby for
- **Specific projects** we should fundraise to support
- **Programs** we should raise funds to develop and implement

The emphasis of your testimony should be on actionable steps that the LMRWD can take to address flooding and its impacts within the watershed district.

Testimony Themes:

Please focus your testimony on one or more of the following themes:

1. **Scientific Causes of Flooding**
 - Analysis of historical rainfall data and flood events
 - Changes to the landscape affecting flooding
 - Impact of recent developments in river management
 2. **Climate Change**
 - The contribution of climate change to increased rainfall and flooding
 - Projections for future climate impacts on the region
 3. **Water Storage along the Minnesota River**
 - Current capacities for natural and man-made water storage
 - Gaps and potential improvements
 4. **Natural Mitigation Strategies**
 - Nature-based solutions (e.g., wetland restoration, reforestation, floodplain management)
 - Exploring alternative cropping practices and soil health as mitigation strategies
 5. **Financial Costs of Flooding**
 - Total financial impacts on property, infrastructure, and public utilities
 - Identifying the financial burden on various stakeholders
 6. **Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions**
 - Estimating the costs of implementing solutions
 - Highlighting long-term benefits
 - Target water flow for the river and watershed allocation
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Written Testimony Format:

We recommend that written testimony follow this **problem-solution-outcome** format:

1. **Problem:** Present the flooding issue you are addressing, supported by data or research.
2. **Solution:** Offer a concrete, actionable solution that the LMRWD can implement.
3. **Outcome:** Explain the expected impact of this solution in mitigating flooding and improving the watershed.

Written testimonies will be part of the public record and thoroughly reviewed by the LMRWD team. Be sure to reference credible sources where possible.

Oral Testimonies:

If selected to present orally during the session, you will have **five minutes** to deliver your testimony. We encourage speakers to focus their time on **solutions** that can be directly implemented by the LMRWD board. Please prepare a clear and concise presentation, supported by evidence or research where applicable.

Hybrid Participation Details:

- **Virtual Access:** While we encourage in-person testimony for selected speakers, those wishing to observe the session remotely must register in advance via Zoom.
 - **No Virtual Testimony:** Please note that we will not be accepting testimony from virtual participants, but you are welcome to submit written testimony.
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Next Steps:

1. **Prepare Your Testimony:** Thoughtfully plan your testimony, building on these guidelines and emphasizing solutions.
 2. **Submit Written Testimony:** Submit your written testimony by [Insert Deadline] to [Insert Email Address].
 3. **RSVP:** Confirm your participation and indicate if you are willing to present orally by [Insert RSVP Deadline] to [Insert Email Address or RSVP Link].
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By focusing on actionable, solution-oriented testimonies, you will play a crucial role in helping the LMRWD take steps toward creating a safer, more resilient future for our watershed. We look forward to hearing your valuable insights.