



Mille Lacs County Historic Courthouse
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Milaca, MN 53535

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BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Mille Lacs Soil and Water Conservation District

Wednesday, February 9, 2026 at 9AM.

A special meeting of the Mille Lacs Soil and Water Conservation District was held at the Mille Lacs County Historic Courthouse, Conference Rm D (lower level).

Members Present

Jake Janski, District 3 – Chair
Andre LaSalle, District 4 – Treasurer
Tim Braun, District 3 - Secretary
Robert Hoefert, District 5

Staff Present

Susan Shaw – District Administrator
Pam Kuhn – Financial Specialist
Lynn Gallice-Resource Conservationist
Molly Clyne-Watershed Organizer
Siena Storm–Resource Conservationist

Members Absent

Dan Campbell, District 1 – Vice Chair

Others Present

Jay Munson – Commissioner Liaison

Chair Janski called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Janski opened the meeting by inviting everyone to speak up whenever they felt like doing so but clarifying that no one would be compelled to say anything or answer any questions they didn't want to. The board wanted to ensure that staff had the opportunity to have a say in policy making for the district. No decisions will be made today, just thoughtful and open discussion. Minutes will be taken of the meeting, but only at a very high-level overview.

To get everyone thinking about an application civic governance, Ms. Clyne was asked to share a presentation on the work she's been doing in the community.

Janski asked those in attendance to consider SWCD Policy 2023-04, which identifies mistrust between the community and government entities as the primary statement of need. This need was first affirmed by the Board in December 2020 and reaffirmed in November 2023. Janski noted that this statement of need was the basis for testing the civic governance framework as a potential solution strategy and asked those in attendance to comment on the current relevance of the need statement.

Janski shared that, while attending a MACI meeting, he realized that Mille Lacs SWCD (MLSWCD) is unique among MACI organizations in testing the Civic Governance Framework developed by Civic Organizing Inc. He noted that this experience may provide lessons MLSWCD could learn from and potentially share with the other 87 SWCDs in Minnesota. Janski emphasized that while there may be value in this work, it is important to discuss the pros and cons thoroughly and avoid simply rubber-stamping a decision.

The SWCD has a responsibility to evaluate the impact of the use of resources and how the tax dollars are allocated for addressing conservation goals. The SWCD has a responsibility to evaluate the effectiveness and the sustainability of actions.

Examples of programs and projects were shared, including how staff assessed the likelihood of successful implementation and long-term sustainability. Stakeholder involvement in a project can be an indicator if a project will succeed.

There was agreement that outreach is very important and when people see others doing something it makes an impact. Whether the district decides to sunset the use of the Civic Governance model or not, nothing will change about the need to do outreach and projects.

An observation shared was that the approach the district takes in outreach has changed over time, influenced by the Civic Governance framework. Discussion included mixed feelings about whether it was a good fit for this SWCD and that the role of organizing others to work with the district while using the civic standards is difficult to imagine. There was agreement that the language of the *Civic Governance Framework* document was too difficult for general public use, and there was acknowledgement that the complexity created discomfort internally with staff and board. Some board members and staff acknowledged they struggle with the language and the application of the framework as well.

Janski asked everyone to consider what would change if the SWCD didn't use the Civic Governance strategy? How would the SWCD do the work differently? Has too much emphasis been put on mistrust as an issue and should that be re-examined?

It was acknowledged that there is a learning curve associated with understanding the approach and applying it in a practical way across different staff roles. For newer staff, who are already learning program rules, policies, and technical information, the additional time required to learn civic approaches can feel overwhelming. Participants noted that learning takes time and that introducing this approach requires people to have adequate time and space to reflect a new approach or different ways of working.

It was acknowledged that some good things have come out of this approach. There was also discomfort expressed about how the approach applies to different staff roles, and to staff versus board members.

It was shared with general agreement that consistency in use internally for staff and board is as important as external use.

When asked what would be different if the SWCD decided to move forward with a 3-year pilot Ms. Shaw described it as opportunity for whichever staff and board members who are interested, to take a leadership role in testing this. Those stepping up for a leadership role would have a closer connection to MACI and would work closely together with Shaw in evaluating this approach. At the end of 3 years MLSWCD would re-evaluate before proceeding.

In closing, Janski asked if anyone had any questions that had not yet been addressed, or comments to make before the board would make a decision.

When asked if the discussion was useful, it was acknowledged that the discussion was very honest and open, and though uncomfortable at times, but it was respectful.

Janski adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

Submitted by: Susan Shaw, District Administrator

Reviewed by: Tim Braun, Board Secretary

Approved by the board on: February 11, 2026

Board Secretary signature:

Date: 2/11/26

