

DRAFT MINUTES

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC)

November 12, 2025

Hybrid Meeting – MN State Capitol 120 & Zoom, pursuant to MS 13D

Call to Order: Chair David Hartwell called the meeting to order at 08:33 a.m. [\(0:01:58\)](#)

Members Present	Members Absent
David Hartwell (Chair)	
Ron Schara (Vice Chair)	
Suzanne Baird	
Rep. John Burkel	
Kristin Eggerling	
Sen. FOUNG Hawj	
Matt Kucharski	
Sen. Andrew Lang	
Darrel Palmer	
Tom Saxhaug	
Ted Suss	
Rep. Samantha Vang	

A quorum was present.

1. Review and Approve Agenda: [\(0:03:01\)](#)

Councilmember Kucharski made a motion to approve the agenda. – **Motion Prevailed**

2. Review and Approve Minutes: [\(0:05:10\)](#)

Councilmember Baird made a motion to approve the minutes from September 24, 2025
– **Motion Prevailed**

3. Conflicts of Interest Reported:

(0:05:33)

Chair Hartwell noted the previously disclosed conflicts of interest concerning Chair Hartwell and Councilmember Palmer. Chair Hartwell and Councilmember Palmer will abstain from discussion relating to the ML 2026 Audubon Society project, HRE 01, "A River of Birds in the Sky: Conserving Minnesota's Flyway". No other conflicts were reported related to today's agenda.

4. Chair's Comments:

(0:05:54)

Chair Hartwell briefed the Council on upcoming items of Council business, including the discussion related to the Executive Director position and discussion of potential changes to the Call for Funding Requests and Hearing Criteria.

5. Executive Director's Report:

(0:07:00)

Executive Director Mark Johnson provided an update to the Council on the expected timeline pertaining to the hiring of an additional full-time Council staff member in the position of Analyst. Mr. Johnson noted that Assistant Director Joe Pavelko and himself presented on the Outdoor Heritage Fund to the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District and the Martin County Board of Commissioners. Mr. Johnson noted a recent call from the Economic Development Manager of the City of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, discussing possible sources of funding for a potential project at Shingle Creek. Mr. Johnson briefed the Council on a House Legacy Committee tour of habitat restoration sites. Mr. Johnson also described a minor conveyance request from the City of Champlin set to be approved.

6. Discussion / Action: 2026 LSOHC Meeting Calendar

(0:12:55)

Chair Hartwell introduced the 2026 draft meeting calendar and requested Councilmembers note any scheduling conflicts. Council discussion followed.

The Council agreed by consensus to advance the calendar as presented with the following changes to Council meeting dates:

- January 8, 2026 changes to January 7, 2026
- June 23 and 24, 2026 changes to June 29 and 30, 2026
- July 29, 2026 changes to July 21, 2026
- September 23, 2026 changes to September 30, 2026
- November 18, 2026 changes to November 5, 2026

7. Discussion / Action: OHF Acquisition of Parcels with Buildings[\(0:22:59\)](#)

Assistant Director Joe Pavelko provided background information on the topic of acquisition of parcels with existing buildings and structures present and the draft policy that relates to. Mr. Pavelko explained the draft policy and the procedures and guidelines its approval would create.

Council discussion followed.

Action:[\(0:30:23\)](#)

Councilmember Eggerling made a motion to approve the Acquisition of Parcels with Buildings policy as presented, with an additional requirement that all acquired parcels with buildings and associated removal costs be reported to the Council.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	NAY:	ABSENT:
Hartwell		
Schara		
Baird		
Rep. Burkel		
Eggerling		
Sen. Hawj		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Saxhaug		
Suss		
Rep. Vang		

12 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

8. Discussion / Action: Review & Approval of Accomplishment Plans[\(0:39:36\)](#)

Assistant Director Pavelko briefed the Council on the review and approval of draft Accomplishment Plans to be included in the ML 2026 OHF bill to be sent to the legislature. Mr. Pavelko highlighted two programs: HRE02, “Bone Lake South Phase 2”,

which requested a substantial shift from the proposal, and HA06, “Greenbelt Phase 1”, which contains both fee-title acquisition and conservation easement acquisition.

Executive Director Johnson noted the previously disclosed conflicts of interest related to HRE01, “A River of Birds in the Sky: Conserving Minnesota’s Flyway”, as well as a potential organizational conflict in that this program seeks to restore or enhance a parcel owned by Belwin Conservancy, of which Council Chair David Hartwell is Board President. Mr. Johnson also discussed that staff would seek additional clarification related to estimated restoration and enhancement costs relating to HA09, “Metro Big Rivers 16”.

Mr. Pavelko discussed the proposed change in the draft Accomplishment Plan of HRE02, “Bone Lake South Phase 2”, which requests budgetary shifts from contracts to capital equipment. Testifiers from the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District described the proposed change.

Council discussion followed.

Action:

(1:06:01)

Councilmember Palmer made a motion to progress all draft Accomplishment Plans as presented, with additional review of HA09, “Metro Big Rivers”, to take place at the December Council meeting.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	NAY:	ABSENT:
Hartwell		Sen. Hawj
Schara		
Baird		
Rep. Burkel		
Eggerling		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Saxhaug		
Suss		
Rep. Vang		

11 AYES, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

9. Discussion / Action: ML 2027/FY 2028 Call for Funding Requests**(1:07:41)**

Executive Director Johnson provided background on the Call for Funding Requests process, the proposal template, and the hearing criteria used to evaluate proposals. Mr. Johnson noted that the hearing criteria and proposal have evolved in the past and encouraged the Council to share any changes Members would suggest with Council staff. All suggestions will be reviewed by staff and brought forth for Council discussion at the December Council meeting.

Council discussion followed.

10. Discussion / Action: Extension of Availability of Funds Requests**(1:39:43)**

Project Analyst Manager Sandy Smith introduced the two extension of funds requests brought before the Council, ML 22, subd. 5(u), "Daylighting Phalen Creek, and ML 21, subd. 5(l), "St. Louis River Restoration Initiative Phase 8". Ms. Smith provided background information summarizing the justifications provided for the extensions requested.

Council discussion followed.

Action:**(1:43:15)**

Councilmember Suss made a motion to approve the extension of availability of funds requests as presented, to be included in the ML 2026 OHF bill for legislative approval.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	NAY:	ABSENT:
Hartwell		Sen. Hawj
Schara		
Baird		
Rep. Burkel		
Eggerling		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Saxhaug		

Suss		
Rep. Vang		

11 AYES, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

11. Discussion / Action: Amendment Request to allow Fee-acquisition activity

[\(1:44:27\)](#)

Executive Director Johnson provided background information on the amendment request, relating to ML 2023, subd. 5(c), and ML 2024, subd. 5(m), “Accelerating Habitat Conservation in Southwest Minnesota”. Mr. Johnson noted that were this request to be approved, it would require legislative changes to session law to allow for fee-acquisition activity in addition to easement acquisition. Minnesota Land Trust staff members presented an explanation of the request.

Council discussion followed.

No motion was made, and the request was not approved.

12. Presentation / Discussion: Understanding DNR Permitting for OHF projects

[\(2:01:40\)](#)

Randall Doneen, Conservation Assistance and Regulation Section Manager, Minnesota DNR, presented to the Council an overview of permitting requirements and regulatory processes, continuous improvement efforts, and recommendations to program managers.

Council discussion followed.

It was resolved that Chair Hartwell will work with staff on a letter from the Council to legislative leadership recommending legislative involvement seeking to simplify and streamline Minnesota’s current environmental permitting review process as it relates to OHF-funded habitat restoration and enhancement projects.

13. Executive Director Candidate Interview / Discussion / Action

[\(3:48:55\)](#)

Chair Hartwell summarized the Executive Director search process. Chair Hartwell described the work of Councilmember volunteers who served on the interview panel in selecting a candidate to advance to the full Council.

The Council interviewed Kristina Smitten for the position of Executive Director of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. [\(3:58:15\)](#)

14. Discussion / Action: Executive Director Candidate Hiring Recommendation [\(4:40:43\)](#)

The Council discussed the candidate interviewed by the Council and the hiring process.

Action: [\(5:12:32\)](#)

Senator Lang made a motion to table the discussion of hiring of the Executive Director.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	NAY:	ABSENT:
Rep. Burkel	Hartwell	
Sen. Lang	Schara	
Palmer	Baird	
Saxhaug	Eggerling	
	Sen. Hawj	
	Kucharski	
	Suss	
	Rep. Vang	

4 AYES, 8 NAYS, 0 ABSENT – Motion does not prevail.

Action: [\(5:13:44\)](#)

Councilmember Baird made a motion to approve the hiring of Kristina Smitten as the Executive Director of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	NAY:	ABSENT:
Hartwell	Rep. Burkel	
Schara	Sen. Hawj	
Baird	Sen. Lang	
Eggerling	Palmer	
Kucharski		
Saxhaug		
Suss		
Rep. Vang		

8 AYES, 4 NAYS, 0 ABSENT – Motion prevailed.

No public testimony was heard.

Meeting adjourned at 1:47 p.m.