

TESTIMONY OF JIM POWELL, MIDWEST ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
ORGANIZATION BOARD MEMBER, JULY 25, 2018

As we all know, it's the budget that demonstrates where the County's priorities are. Unfortunately, we were not able to find any proposed budget numbers to go with your draft recommendations, so we don't know if the Commission is proposing increasing funding to protect and improve water quality or simply giving recommendations to staff on what to focus on?

Can you tell me which it is?

In the context of your water quality improvement, community outreach and education goals described in your budget recommendations, I encourage to reflect on what you are hearing from a "diversity of voices today to understand the various ways in which county residents relate to water and the different contexts in which water is used" and let that "inform your decision making."

What I just said is from the Commission's Equity and Inclusion Commitment Statement.

Your Equity and Inclusion Plan goes on to state that you should "look for opportunities to include a variety of voices in ad hoc advisory groups and remove barriers and increases for communities to provide input."

So here are our recommendations:

- Put Starkweather Creek contamination issues on the Commission agenda and begin to learn more of what we just skimmed the surface of here tonight.
- Consider creating a Starkweather Creek working group to really delve into issues that affect the major tributary of Lake Monona, a DNR severely impaired waterway that winds its way through polluted and low-income neighborhoods.
- Take advantage of MEJO's EPA-funded environmental justice work concerning the Creek—we have lots of information, knowledge of known and suspected contaminants, contacts and perspective that can inform an equity- and inclusion-oriented approach to improve the water quality of the creek.
- Ask the Air National Guard to hold a public meeting regarding its known PFAS pollution, test results and remediation plans.
- Conduct testing in creek water and sediments in locations adjacent to County-owned land, as well as downstream from those areas. This is in the Truax and Darbo neighborhoods which are neighborhoods that are predominantly of color and low-income. Environmental justice requires that these residents have the opportunity to enjoy the natural resources of the county that are right there—Starkweather Creek.

- As owner of the properties and in and around the airport and Truax Field that are known contaminant sources—and as part of the MAMSWAP stormwater permitting coalition—the County has the authority to test the creek itself and not just rely on military site tests to determine the extent of the problem which will inform ways to address it.