Stantec

Taconite Harbor Advisory Committee – Environmental Context – Meeting Summary

Date: December 17th, 6-7:30pm

Location: Virtual (Microsoft Teams)

Meeting Purpose

- Objective: Inform Advisory Committee members about the environmental context of the Taconite Harbor site to guide future reuse recommendations for Cook County EDA.
- Focus: Natural resources present at the site, environmental regulatory framework and requirements, and findings from the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment.

Key Topics Covered

1. Natural Characteristics & Environmental Context
    - Land Cover: Mix of deciduous/mixed forest, wetlands, barren land, and developed areas; some natural regrowth but significant disturbance.
    - Threatened & Endangered Species: Several plant species [e.g., Hoary Whitlow Grass (endangered), Alpine Woodsia (threatened)] and some animals (e.g., Peregrine Falcon, special concern) potentially on-site or within one mile.
    - Water Resources: 13 wetlands mapped; includes freshwater ponds, emergent wetlands, riverine wetlands, and Lake Superior shoreline with additional desktop evaluation and clarification (e.g., stormwater pond on site clariefied not to be a “lake”) FEMA floodplain mapping is incomplete but likely extends into site.
    - Geology & Soils: Surficial geology includes glacial till, silt, clay; bedrock is Schroeder basalt. Soils are loam/silt/sand/gravel, non-hydric, well-drained, not prime farmland.
    - North Shore Management Zone: Entire site falls under North Shore Management Board (NSMB) oversight; Cook County is zoning authority.
2. Regulatory Framework
    - Federal: Section 404 wetland permit (USACE), Section 7 (species), Section 106 (cultural resources), NEPA review possible if federalized with federal permit or funds.

- State: Minnesota Environmental Review (EAW/EIS/AUAR), MPCA permits (NPDES, SDS, air), DNR floodplain/species, BWSR wetlands, SHPO/MIAC cultural resources.
- Local: NSMB review, floodplain, setbacks, impervious surface limits.

3. Environmental Site Assessment (Phase I)
    - Desktop review completed; validity ~180 days.
    - Findings (full Phase 1 ESA to be provided at a later date):
        - Potential contamination from heavy metals, fuel, fly ash; documented spills and fires; possible PFAS from firefighting foam.
        - 22 storage tanks historically on-site; 8 previously active but now removed; 2 active leak sites cleaned and pending closure.
        - Other concerns: buried infrastructure, imported fill.
        - Cleanup needs depend on future use (higher standards for residential).
4. Minnesota Power Decommissioning Update
    - Tanks removed; leak sites excavated and cleaned; asbestos and hazardous materials addressed; stormwater restoration pending spring completion.
    - PCB contamination in substation area remediated; no widespread mercury/lead testing beyond building materials.
    - Groundwater/surface water impacts not detected; ash ponds monitored under MPCA permits.

Key Discussion Points

- Clarified North Shore Management Board’s role and upcoming plan update.
- As potential individual redevelopment projects are identified, more detailed study is anticipated specific to those projects.
- Questions on contamination hotspots, ash ponds, and regulatory responsibilities.

Emphasis on developer perspective: uncertainty and cleanup costs are major considerations; AUAR can reduce risk but not eliminate costs.

Decisions & Next Steps

- Next session is January 7, 2026: Economic and market context session.

- Scenario planning: Begin shaping reuse concepts in early 2026.
- Public-facing review planned after scenario development phase.