March 12, 2021

Dear Commissioners Lunde, Fernando, Greene, Conley, Goettel, LaTondresse, and Anderson:

We submit the following statement as a rejection of the [**Draft Hennepin County Climate Action Plan**](https://www.hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/your-government/projects-initiatives/documents/hennepin-county-draft-climate-action-plan.pdf) and a call for a framework more rooted in community feedback.

The Hennepin County Climate Action Plan is a blueprint for how the county will pursue initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The plan seeks to identify strategies to adapt to the changing climate in ways that reduce vulnerabilities and ensure a more equitable and resilient Hennepin County. The problems with the plan can be summarized as:

1. The plan should have stronger economy-wide greenhouse gas mitigation goals. The goal of an 80% emissions reduction by 2050 is too little, too late. The goal should be amended to achieve an 80% reduction by 2035 and 100% net zero emissions by 2050.
2. The plan does not adequately address the main source of greenhouse gas emissions: transportation.
   1. The plan should set a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction goal of 30% by 2030.
   2. The plan should remove Level of Service (LOS), a transportation engineering measurement that disproportionately favors moving vehicles rather than people. Alternatively, transit, bicycling, and walking LOS must be equal to or better than private vehicle LOS.
   3. Road projects must prioritize safety over speed and insure communities who are often left out are included in the design and construction process.
   4. The plan should not include park-and-rides. Instead of subsidizing private vehicle use with inexpensive or free parking, county resources should be directed to improved public transit, affordable housing, and transit oriented development in land near transit stations.
   5. The plan should set a 100% electric vehicle county fleet goal.
3. The plan ignores a key concern of BIPOC community members. The Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC), a major source of pollution in Hennepin County which inequitably harms poor and BIPOC communities is only mentioned once in the appendix. Community members have actively advocated for increased zero waste initiatives as a way to move away from the harms of trash incineration. Prioritizing our spending in the necessary reassessment of our county’s waste management system in a way that directly confronts waste stream issues.
4. Community input was solicited but then not incorporated into later iterations of the plan. The county hosted several feedback sessions for the first draft of the plan that were meant to engage with constituents around content, vision, and implementation. However, it is clear that with the most recent draft of the proposal, substantial community input was not included in a meaningful way. Instead, the plan attempts to analyze climate change without the necessary lens of environmental justice taken into consideration. Within feedback sessions the COVID-19 pandemic was identified as a major concern by participants. A key aspect of this concern was the ways in which air pollution exacerbated the risk of residents contracting the illness with residents of EJ communities suffering the most. The plan as it stands does not address how the county will incorporate the effects of the pandemic into their implementation plans. For community members this EJ designation is an important part of telling the full story.
5. The county states in the section titled “Protecting Vulnerable Communities,” that they are committed to addressing the disparities between residents of color and their white counterparts. For this to happen, Environmental Justice must be at the forefront of what is being constructed within the Climate Action Plan. This means that a framework seeking to improve resilience must also be willing to confront the root causes of these inequities, and the role that county-led initiatives play towards creating those circumstances.
6. We are asking for the county to use their resources and planning time to come to the table with tangible solutions around increasing climate resiliency. Not only does this include mitigation and reparation of environmental harm but also a real commitment towards expanding affordable housing opportunities, increasing access to green public spaces, and thinking creatively about how those areas can work to meet public needs.

The Hennepin County Climate Action Plan, if done right, has the opportunity to work towards major systemic changes that would vastly improve the living conditions of all our communities and particularly our BIPOC communities. We need a plan that boldly confronts inequities, climate change and prioritizes the feedback solicited from marginalized communities. We look forward to seeing the county come forward with a bold, new plan that will truly address the climate and environmental justice crisis.

It’s 2021. The [IPCC Special Report](https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/) tells us we have just a few years to make a hard pivot away from business as usual. We share the urgency to advance climate justice. However, we need to make sure that we get both the process and the substance right.

We ask that the County not move forward with the Climate Action Plan until the above concerns, and the feedback you have already received on these topics, are incorporated.

Thank you and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Margaret Levin

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