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April 9, 2021

Hennepin County Board

RE: Hennepin County Climate Action Plan

Dear Hennepin County Board Members,

The City of Minnetonka has a long history of environmental stewardship and continues to work to meet our environmental and energy goals. The City of Minnetonka supports Hennepin County's effort to create a Climate Action Plan. Below are specific areas of acknowledgement, support, additional considerations, and areas that require further evaluation from the City of Minnetonka.

Acknowledgement: Hennepin County has demonstrated, through their draft Climate Action Plan, that they intend to not only reduce greenhouse emissions community-wide, but also be a community leader with their own organization. The following are Hennepin County Organization efforts that the City would like to acknowledge.

- Hennepin County Buildings: Hennepin County's proposed policy within the draft Climate Action Plan to prioritize renovation over building new, promote adaptability design for buildings, and require sustainability purchasing are great ways to ensure Hennepin County continues to be a sustainable organization.
- Electric Vehicle and Charging Station Support: Engaging with regional and statewide efforts to advance electric vehicles and installing charging stations, though stepped goals and 2030 plan for light duty vehicles, as well as implementing additional hybrid vehicles for reductions, is a positive and practical approach. This section addresses funding and operational challenges that must be considered and allows time for planning efforts involved.

Support: The City of Minnetonka supports several sections and statements within the draft Hennepin County Climate Action Plan. Moving forward, the City looks forward to collaborating on several goals and initiatives, including the following.

- Emission Reduction Goal: The City of Minnetonka has recently passed an energy action plan that seeks to reduce energy related greenhouse gas emissions by 41 percent by 2030 (using a 2016-2018 baseline). The City looks forward to partnering, where possible, to achieve both our goals and the county's goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050.
- Expanding Urban Canopy: The City has long been a supporter of canopy expansion and protection within our community, as evidenced by the city's aggressive tree protection ordinance, annual tree sales, Tree City USA designation, and various education opportunities provided to residents. The City of Minnetonka looks forward to assisting with the canopy expansion goals as applicable.

- Food Waste: The City of Minnetonka strongly supports preventing food waste and diverting organic material from trash. It has been challenging to increase local participation. However, this is an important goal and the city looks forward to finding opportunities to assist with the county's food waste goals.

Additional Considerations: As with any community plan, there are always areas for improvement and enhancement. Below are areas that the City of Minnetonka recommends the county reconsider, expand or clarify.

- Packaging Materials: The plan properly focuses on food waste and construction materials. However, the County could challenge this area by also addressing packaging materials, which comes with so much of what we purchase, within their Climate Action Plan.
- Funding: There is no mention of costs to achieve all of the goals outlined in the plan. It seems appropriate to include some funding information in the partnership section. This section could also include that the county and various local governmental units would pursue various funding mechanisms.
- Public Transportation: Increasing ridership on public transportation is an important strategy to reducing vehicle miles traveled within the county. While the proposed plan proposes to "advocate for the buildout of planned transit routes and development of new routes," the City challenges the County to consider alternative ways to increase ridership. This could be through improving waiting areas, riding experience, or even general ease of use.
- Bicycles: The plan addresses bicycle transportation as a strategy to reduce greenhouse gases, but it also misses a few opportunities as they relate to bicycles. Specifically, the plan should include:
 - o E-bikes in areas of the plan that address bicycle strategies;
 - o Increasing bike infrastructure (bike parking, maintenance stations, etc.) on both public and private property;
 - o Safe routes to school for children; and
 - o Bike education.
- Enhanced Partnership with Local Governmental Units: An area that could be enhanced is specifying collaboration with local government units (LGUs). Specifically, several communities, including the City of Minnetonka in 2020, have created Energy Action Plans through Xcel Energy's Partners in Energy program or have already created their own Climate Action Plan. LGUs are doing a lot of important work in the climate change field and it would be a missed opportunity if this were not addressed in the plan. By not being specific in describing the collaboration, there may be duplication of efforts that creates inefficiency.
- Private Partnership: The draft Climate Action Plan generally mentions the business community throughout the plan; however, specific partnership opportunities are not mentioned. The City of Minnetonka believes that not fully engaging the business community would be a missed opportunity to enhance public/private relationships and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Increased communication and collaboration with cities through regularly scheduled

communications that could include: general updates, city email list, presentations, knowledge sharing about building benchmarking, green initiative funding, etc. will be absolutely necessary to achieve several goals of city and county plans. The collaboration to achieve these strategies do not appear to be clearly outlined within the plan.

Further City Evaluation Needed: Below are areas that require further evaluation from the City of Minnetonka before supporting.

- Flooding: The subject plan addresses the issue of increased stormwater and localized flooding. It would be helpful to understand the county's commitment to additional funding to address the strategies outlined in the plan.
- Disaster Partnership: The plan outlines a strategy to improve preparation for and response to extreme weather events, flooding and other climate disasters. In the strategy, it notes partnering and coordinating with public entities and cities. The plan does outline opportunities and strategies. As noted above, it would be helpful to understand funding amounts to ensure adequate funding is available to assist with partner projects. This would ensure that unreasonable burdens are not placed on cities during weather related emergencies, disaster events, or infrastructure projects.
- Reassessment of Development Grants: The plan states that the county would reassess grants and financial incentives "to increase market transformation of climate-friendly buildings." The City of Minnetonka is excited to learn more about the County's thoughts regarding grant and financial incentive modifications, but would need more information prior to commenting on or supporting new funding policies.
- Local Powers: The subject plan addresses zoning, land use, platting, and other locally controlled planning. The City looks forward to working with the County on these various items, but further evaluation of policies, review of how this translates to a community level, and possibly a case-by-case review may be needed for city support.

By creating a Climate Action Plan, Hennepin County will be continuing their leadership in sustainability. The initiatives within the draft Climate Action Plan will ensure a sustainable future for current and future county residents. The City of Minnetonka applauds Hennepin County's foresight and efforts, and looks forward to collaborating with the County wherever possible.

Sincerely,

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Geralyn Barone
City Manager
City of Minnetonka

Cc: Minnetonka City Council
Cc: Julie Wischnack, Community Development Director, AICP
Cc: Drew Ingvalson, Planner