

Addressing the Sustainability Gap in the Development Review Process

A Guide for Empowering Environmental Communities

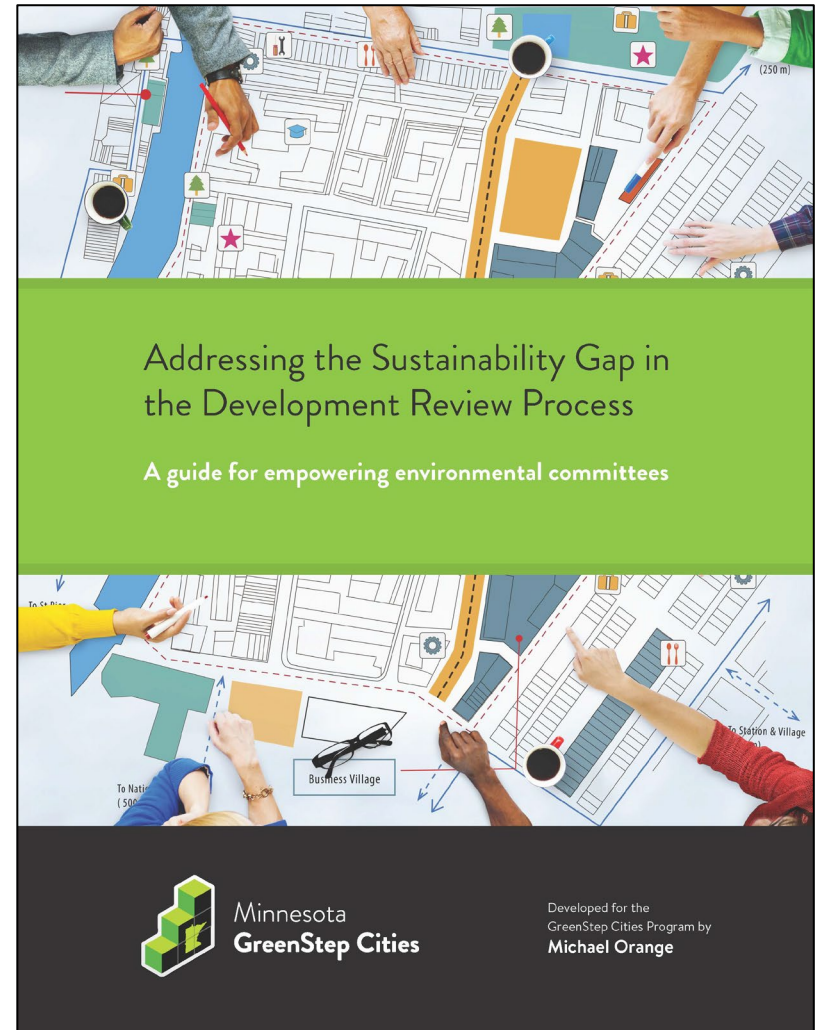
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Prepared via the

Retiree Environmental Technical Assistance Program (RETAP)

for the GreenStep Cities Program



Purpose: Empower environmental committees to be more effective at making their cities more sustainable, resilient, and equitable by advocating for an environmental focus throughout the city's development review process.

Includes:

- 80 links to the best practices in the GreenStep Cities program
- 5 pages of resources with 100 links to other resources

Development review process:

- Where the proverbial “rubber meets the road.”
- Where a city’s zoning code and other ordinances translate the city’s longer-range, more general, more aspirational policies and plans into concrete, steel, and sustainable design.
- Cities must lead by example.

Anycity
Comprehensive
Plan

Anycity
Natural
Resources Plan

Anycity
Zoning Code

Anycity
Stormwater
Management
Ordinance

The Role of the Environmental Committee:

- Not expected to become experts in every field.
- Raise questions and demand answers as to why a large project doesn't:
 - Maximize energy efficiency
 - Minimize greenhouse gas emissions
 - Protect the environment and natural resources
 - Curb sprawl
 - Protect living wage jobs
 - Produce affordable housing
 - Manage stormwater on site, etc.

We know what needs to be done

We know that it needs to be done yesterday

We know how to do it and how to pay for it

We know that doing it will save money over the longer run.

The only real barrier is **commitment**.

That's where environmental committees can help.

Advocate for the courage to do the right thing.

Sections: The guide has 8 main sections:

Section 1—Climate Change Future

A Call to Action:

Committee members can use the information to advocate for urgent change.

GRETA THUNBERG:

“THIS IS ALL WRONG. I SHOULDN'T BE UP HERE. I SHOULD BE BACK IN SCHOOL ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE OCEAN. YET YOU ALL COME TO US YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HOPE. HOW DARE YOU! YOU HAVE STOLEN MY DREAMS AND MY CHILDHOOD WITH YOUR EMPTY WORDS. AND YET I'M ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES. PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING. PEOPLE ARE DYING. ENTIRE ECOSYSTEMS ARE COLLAPSING. WE ARE IN THE BEGINNING OF A MASS EXTINCTION, AND ALL YOU CAN TALK ABOUT IS MONEY AND FAIRY TALES OF ETERNAL ECONOMIC GROWTH. HOW DARE YOU!”

STATEMENT BY CLIMATE ACTIVIST GRETA THUNBERG, 16, AT THE UNITED NATION'S CLIMATE ACTION SUMMIT IN NEW YORK CITY ON 9/23/19

Minnesota Next Generation Energy Act of 2007:

- 80% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050.
- The State is not on track to meet the goals

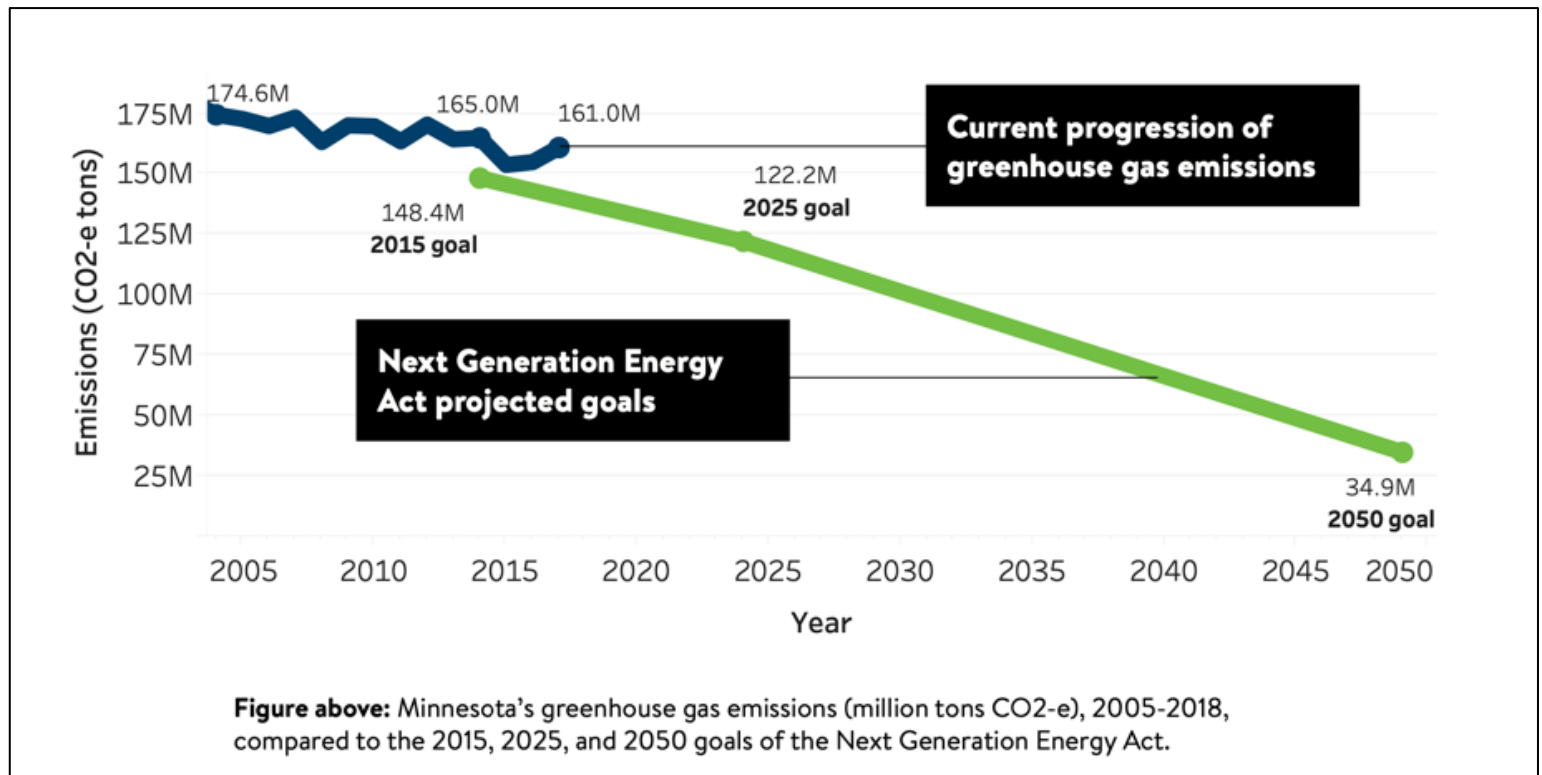


Figure 1: Source: [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory: 2005 to 2018](#), MPCA, 2021

It's happening in cities!

- 92% of Minnesotans live in cities and towns
- Cities are the source for 3/4 of CO₂
- 146 cities have joined the **GreenStep Cities** program.

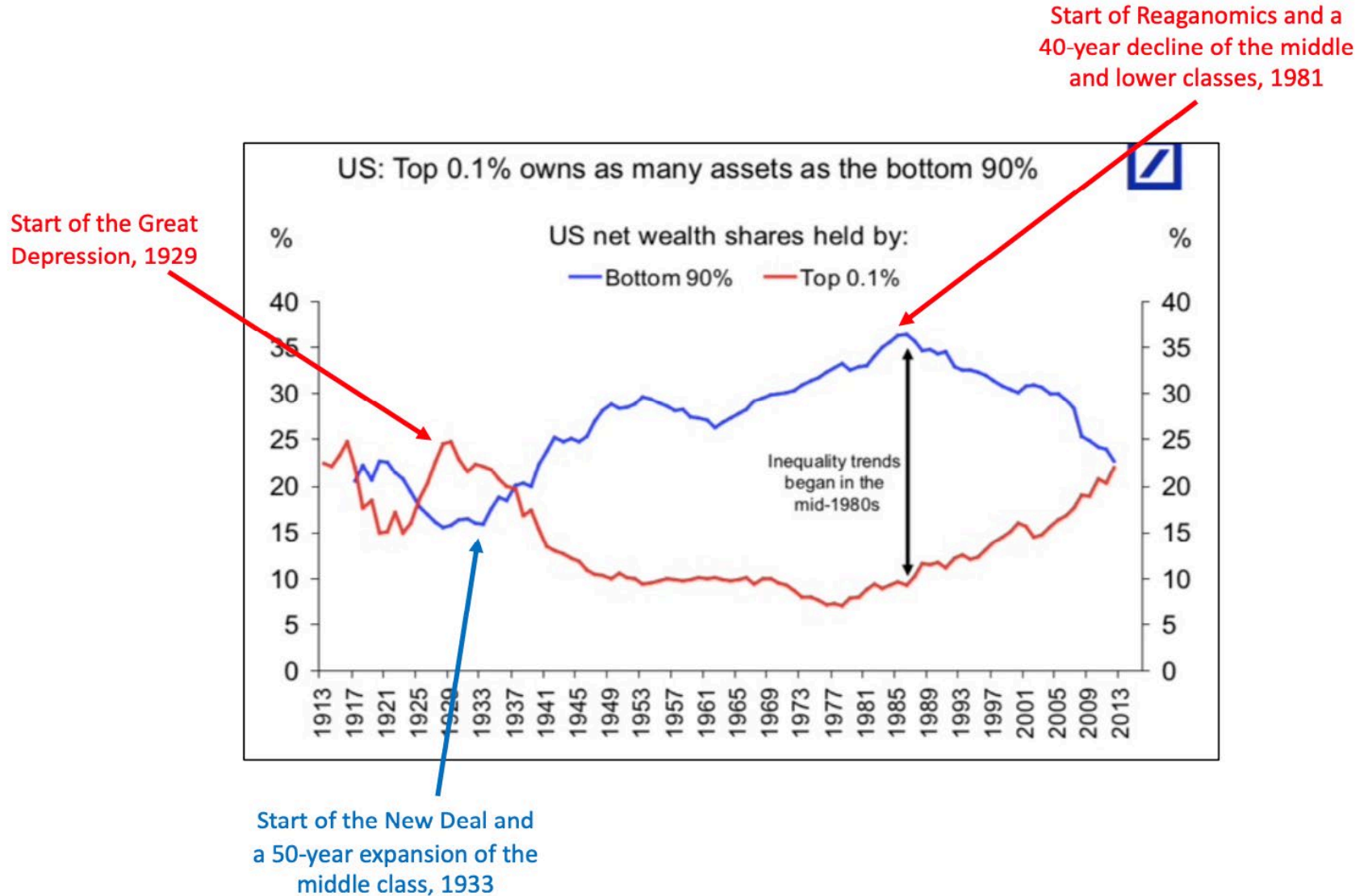
Consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the climate, technology, and the economy:

- Increased remote shopping and excess retail space
- Increased remote employment
- Reduced commuting and parking demands
- Employment changes
- Transition to electrified transportation
- Mixed-use and mixed-income developments

Section 2—The Third “E” in Sustainability—Equity and Climate Refugees:

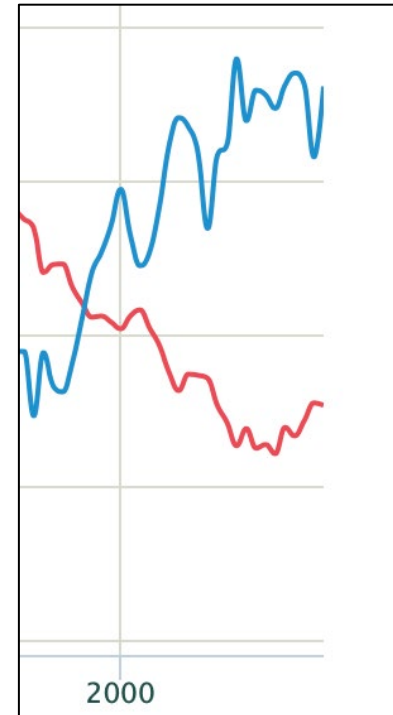
We are facing an environmental and an equity crisis.

Paul Krugman analysis:



It has just gotten much worse from 2013 to 2023

From the World Inequality Database



Pre-tax national income | Bottom 50% | share | ADULTS | EQUAL SPLIT

Pre-tax national income | Top 1% | share | ADULTS | EQUAL SPLIT

Section 3—Environmental Advocacy and the Development Review Process:

How to translate the more general and aspirational language of a city's comprehensive plan into change on the ground using the city's ordinances, especially the zoning code.

Counter-balancing city codes relative to city goals:

Zoning codes often lag behind sustainability goals.

It can be an uphill battle to make projects more consistent with those goals.

The Walls:

- Invited too late in the development review process
- Ignored
- Climate deniers
- NIMBY
- Good enough for Anycity
- City attorney: "... my hands are tied ..."

Meanwhile BAU (business as usual) takes us over the climate change cliff

You can advocate for a greener project:

- **City assistance:**
 - Site assembly or condemnation
 - Loans and grants
 - Tax deferral
 - Tax increment financing (TIF)
- **Special permits (not “permits of right” like a simple construction permit):**
 - Rezoning
 - Variance
 - Conditional use permit (CUP)
 - Site plan review
 - Planned unit development (PUD)

Section 4—Minnesota Programs for Local Governments:

Report summarizes 20 state and local programs that can help a city establish and meet its sustainability goals.

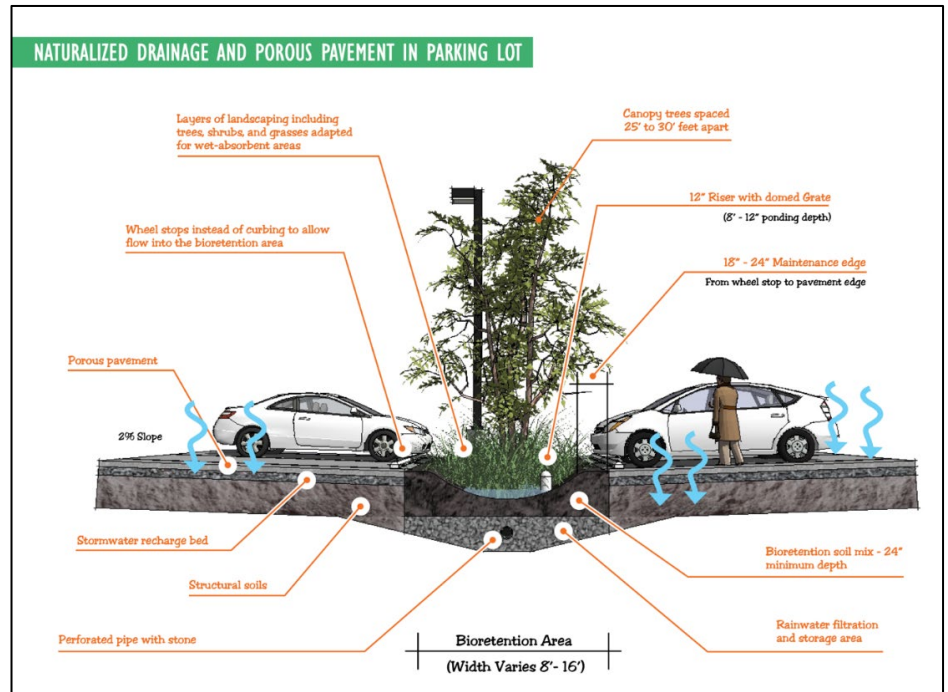
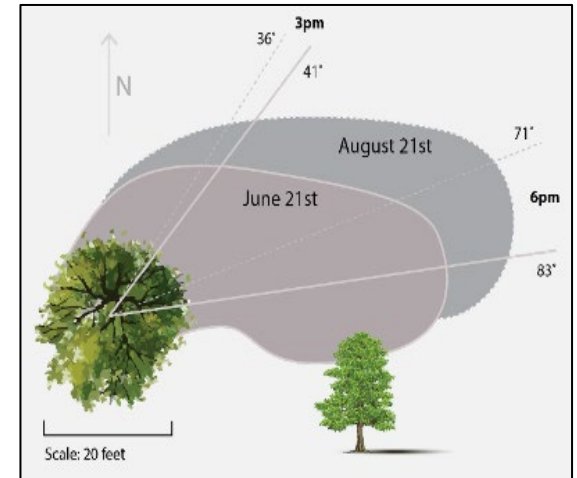
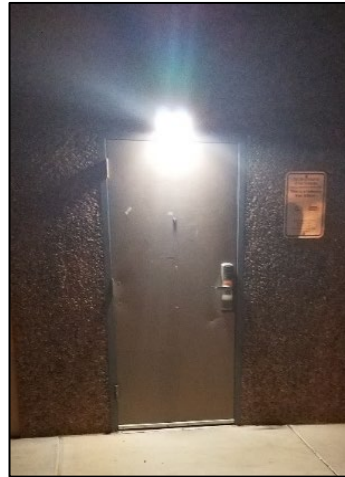
Section 5—Municipal Development Tools:

Opportunities for improving sustainability: [All hyperlinked to the GreenStep Cities program and other resources](#)

- Siting structures
- Building reuse, adaptability, and deconstruction
- Sustainable building design
- Solar resources
- GHG reduction strategies
- Electric vehicles
- Wildlife habitat

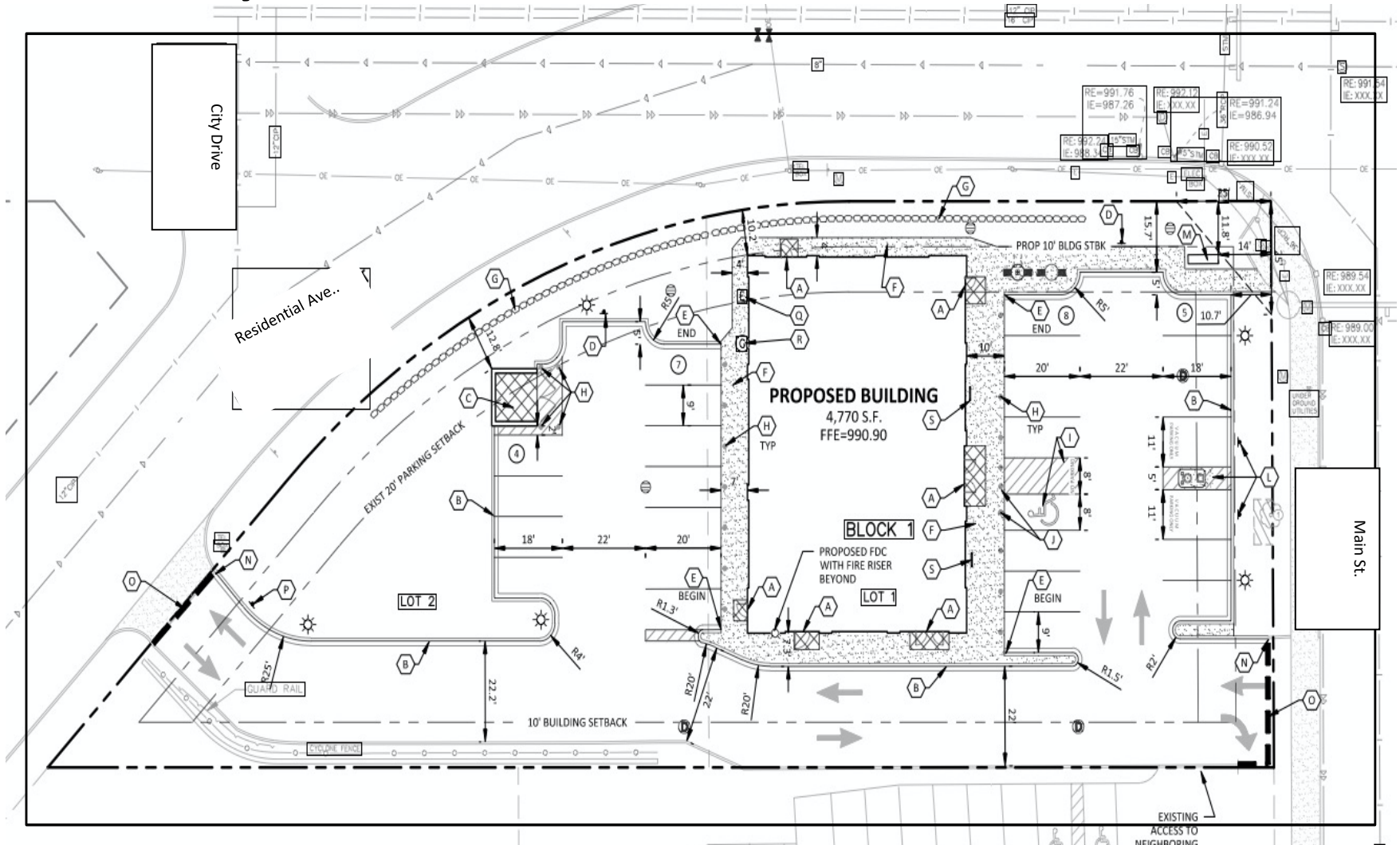
Opportunities for improving sustainability (cont.):

- Outdoor lighting
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- Equitable mobility
- Parking and travel demand management
- Landscaping and parking lot design
- Stormwater management
- Economic impact analysis
- Emergency management

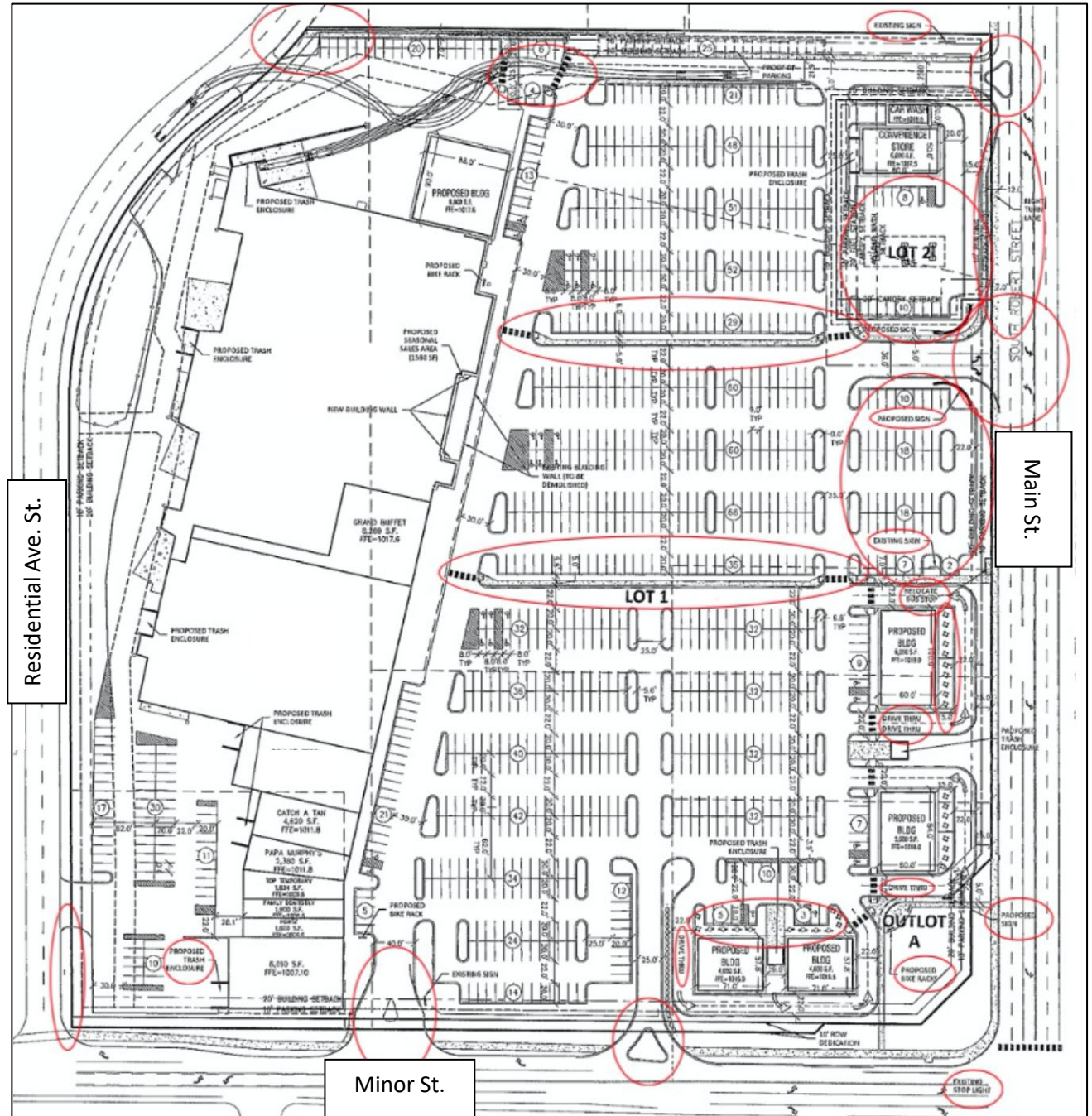


Section 6—Case Studies:

Case Study #1—Review of a Site Plan for a Laundromat



Case Study #2— Review of a Shopping Center Expansion Project



Section 8—Resources:

5 pages with 80 links to the best practices of the GreenStep Cities program and 100 links to other resources

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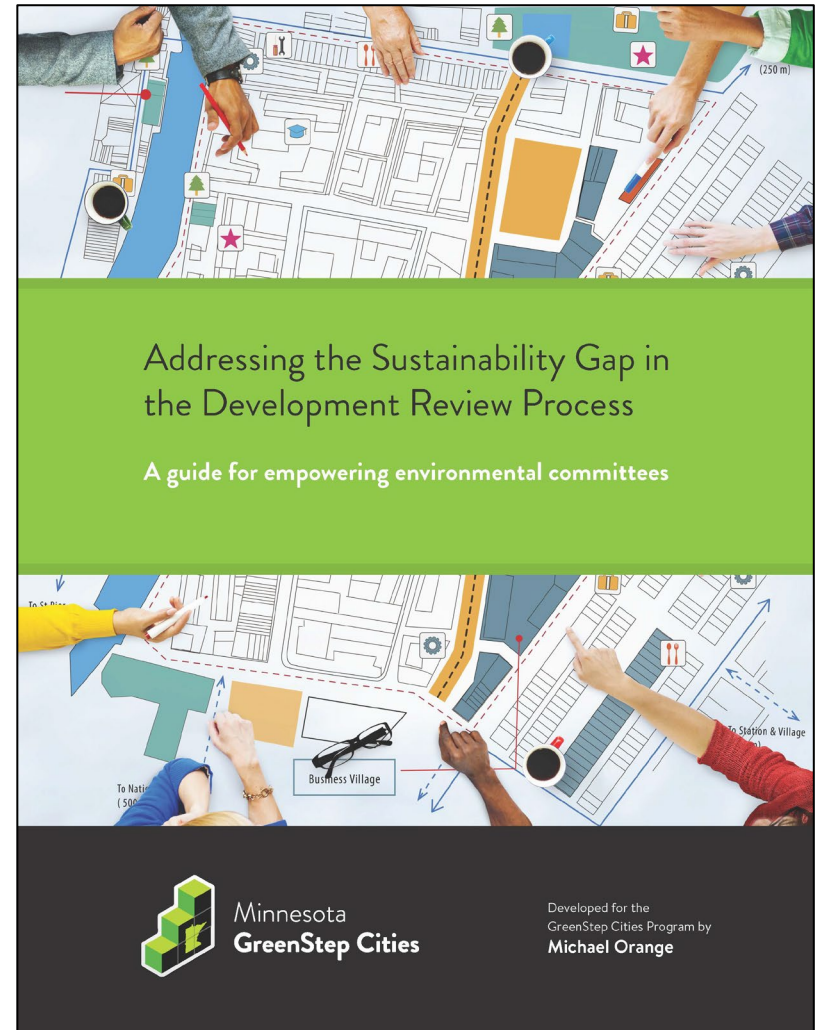
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Summary

Prioritizing Municipal Actions to Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change

An Overview

Michael Orange, 12/28/22

Introduction, Purpose, and Audience

This is a *high-altitude* prioritization of the actions a Minnesota city should take to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Hopefully, it can offer encouragement and direction for a city's green champion. Virtually every action a city takes to save energy and become more resilient and adaptable to climate change will also save money for the city and its residents. It just makes sense/cents!

B3 Program

GreenStep Cities:

Greenhouse gas assessments:

- **City operations GHG assessment:**
- **Citywide GHG assessment and reduction goals:**

Climate action plan:

Costs: