

July 22, 2016

To: Northfield Environmental Quality Commission

From: Northfield Energy Friends

Re: 2008 Northfield Energy Task Force Report – Next Steps

Dear Environmental Quality Commission,

We like to think of Northfield as a place that strives to provide its citizens with a superior quality of life. This includes an environment that is conducive to both physical and mental health, a sense of peace and security, and optimism for the future. Northfield's forward-thinking environmental efforts – including a strong sustainable agriculture community, citywide recycling, local land and water conservation efforts, a walkable downtown lined with well-preserved historic structures, grassroots community solar and three commercial-size wind turbines - offer tangible contributions to that quality of life.

We have also observed how communities such as Oberlin, Ohio through their "Oberlin Project"¹ are making bold commitments to sustainability on a multi-focused, community-wide basis. These include groundbreaking proposals to become "climate positive" by creating more energy than they consume, creating thriving local green business economy, preserving significant amount of greenspace around the city for sustainable farming and renewable energy, and creating sustainability-focused educational alliances between the local K-12 and college communities. We have also noticed cities nationwide - and many here in Minnesota - which have made bold commitments to achieving carbon neutrality² by a specific target date.

We acknowledge that the City of Northfield has shown continuing leadership through its achievements in the Greenstep Cities program, energy conservation measures in City buildings, improved groundwater management, and other efforts to become more sustainable. But like those cities mentioned above, we would like to see Northfield raise the stakes, particularly in the areas of energy supply and demand which are key components of mitigating climate change.

The 2008 Mayor's Energy Task Force report³ engaged a team of citizen researchers, countless hours of effort and over seventy pages of text to analyze and report on various energy stewardship strategies ranging from a simple accounting of citywide greenhouse gas emissions to an evaluation of what it would take for Northfield to form an independent municipal utility company. The report details a list of recommended actions and provides an honest assessment of options that proved to be unsuitable. Yet at the time it was presented, this report was overshadowed by other unrelated events and the report was abandoned without sufficient review, discussion or response.

¹ Information on The Oberlin Project can be found at www.oberlinproject.org

² The term "carbon neutrality" refers to having net zero greenhouse gas emissions

³ The 2008 Mayor's Energy Task Force Report, "With Hope: A Resilient Community," can be found at this link: <http://northfieldsustainability.org/northfield-energy-task-force/>

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The Northfield Energy Friends has reviewed that report again in the context of today's energy and sustainability landscape. Much of its content still applies, but it can be overwhelming to consider taking it all on at once. We would therefore like the Environmental Quality Commission to consider recommending to the City Council the following "quick-start" list of actions as a manageable starting point. We hope that completing this list will create momentum to take on additional actions from the 2008 report and to set new, more ambitious energy and sustainability goals that incorporate current technological, economic and policy advancements.

Our short list of recommended energy-related action items is as follows:

- 1) Per Northfield's commitment to the CCPC⁴, do an annual carbon emissions calculation and post publicly. This report should take into consideration carbon emissions for City of Northfield owned properties and emissions for the City of Northfield as a whole.
- 2) Engage a citizen task force with the charge of utilizing the City's participation in the Minnesota B3 program to advance public awareness and education regarding building energy use in Northfield.
- 3) Initiate a comparison study of other city-wide Climate Action Plans that target net zero carbon emissions to inform future creation of a Northfield Climate Action Plan
- 4) Formalize formation of an Energy Commission which will facilitate progress on the above items and continued updates to - and implementation of - the 2008 Energy Task Force report

Presumably, completion of this list would provide a starting point for further action on the next set of energy-related priorities. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with the EQC and/or to join you in presenting these recommendations to the City Council.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss this proposal with you at the next EQC meeting.

Sincerely,

Members of the Northfield Energy Friends

⁴ CCPC is the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1354983042000246252?journalCode=cloe20#.V4fZG_krJaQ