

*****DRAFT*****

To: City Council

From: EQC

RE: Strategic Planning Priorities

The Council has identified six areas for attention this year.

1) Climate/energy:

This emerged as our top priority. The Energy Working Group has recommended that the city develop a climate action plan, and we agree. The city has been committed to coordinated action to address climate change at least since 2005. That goal is reflected in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, the city's participation in the Greensteps program, and the Complete Streets Initiative. Developing a climate action plan is the next logical step.

Therefore, our major recommendation is that the Council resolve to create a Climate Action Plan, which will serve as an environmental "master plan." Preparing the City for carbon-constrained future will involve adapting all elements of the city's infrastructure, as well as public outreach. A Climate Action Plan should focus not only on setting concrete, achievable goals for reducing GHG emissions but also on helping the Northfield community understand how a comprehensive approach to addressing climate change can protect and enhance Northfield's quality of life.

How will climate change affect Northfield? Climate models do not yet provide certainty about how SE Minnesota's climate will change, but a 2013 National Climate Assessment Report by the U.S. Global Climate Research Program provides some guidance.¹ This report concludes that we can expect:

- The average temperature will rise by 5 degrees Fahrenheit, from the current 46-50 degrees to about 55 degrees F. Most of the warming is expected to happen in winters and summers.
- Trends in annual precipitation for southeast Minnesota are highly uncertain (only southwest Minnesota is expected to become drier). But we can expect more extreme rain events, which will lead to more flooding and may affect erosion and water quality.
- Heat wave intensity and frequency will also increase.

We should also expect continued volatility and gradual increases in the price of fossil fuels, particularly since there is some possibility that state or national policy will eventually tax carbon emissions. Renewable energy should become more affordable over time.

¹ *National Climate Assessment Report, Jan. 2013. Prepared by the U.S. Global Climate Research Program, <http://www.globalchange.gov/what-we-do/assessment>.*

All of these trends indicate that the City should focus on increasing its reliance on renewable energy, energy efficiency, managing stormwater run-off and flood control, and improving the quality and resilience of the urban habitat.

- 2) **Water resources:** Flood control and protecting our river and streams both require attention to reducing stormwater run-off during extreme rain events. The City's rain garden and rain barrel program is on-going, and we intend to monitor it. The CAP should give special attention to this subject, which promises to be a challenging one.
- 3) **Urban Habitat protection and enhancement:** Climate change, invasive species, and pests like the emerald ashborer are major threats to our urban habitat. We would like to follow up on the asset management plan developed to enhance the urban forest (a goal of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. We also encourage the efforts by Beautify Northfield to enhance pollinator habitat. These are the two main initiatives we intend to focus on this year.
- 4) **Transportation:** Our main initiative is making the community more bike-friendly, which is consistent with the City's Complete Streets policy. We also are mindful of the need to improve transportation options for people with limited mobility; this also could fit into a climate action plan, perhaps calling for improved public transportation options.
- 5) **Waste Management:** Waste management is an important source of GHG emissions, from transporting it and from landfills or incinerators. The best way to manage waste is to reduce it. Our primary initiative on this front is the composting program. However, we are also concerned about methane emissions from the landfill. Although not under city jurisdiction, the community might support action to better manage those emissions under a climate action plan.
- 6) **Community outreach:** Public support and engagement is critical to the success of environmental management initiatives. Developing the CAP should be a broad-based effort that engages the whole community. Earth Day is an important focus for engaging the community with local environmental issues, and City should continue to support it. We anticipate the need for additional outreach to local businesses, faith communities, and other community organizations to gain input and support for smart climate planning.