

## ***Climate impact of big builds assessed***

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**Highlight:** State pilot program adds greenhouse gases to environmental reviews.

### **Body**

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As Minnesota ramps up the fight on **climate change** it will soon require developers to measure the greenhouse gases from large new projects.

The calculations will start in January as part of a nine-month pilot program to phase in detailed **climate change** questions into the state's environmental reviews.

The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) approved the pilot approach Wednesday, after years of work. It plans to collect feedback and make improvements on the revised form, called an environmental assessment worksheet, by the end of 2022 and then set final **changes**.

"This is not a study. This is action," EQB chairwoman Margaret Anderson Kelliher said.

Other board members voiced support at Wednesday's meeting.

"What doesn't get measured cannot be managed," said Aditya Ranade, deputy commissioner of the state Commerce Department's Division of Energy Resources. "This needs to happen now through the economy."

At issue is a revised and expanded environmental assessment worksheet that requires developers to quantify a range of greenhouse gases from new projects such as carbon dioxide and methane. It also requires them to discuss ways of mitigating the pollution and how well their project can withstand **climate change** challenges such as flooding.

The agency performing the environmental review can choose the calculator they want to use to measure the greenhouse gas emissions. The worksheet lists options.

The **changes** are not without controversy. Measuring greenhouse gases can be complex and developers may have to hire a consultant to complete the worksheet, adding time and cost to projects.

Bryan Murdock, an environmental consultant in Wyoming, Minn., and a public member of the EQB board, cast the sole "nay" vote. He said he thinks a

wholesale **change** of the worksheet is unnecessary, and that it doesn't do enough to distinguish between large and small emitters.

"I just don't want to break the back of the small business," Murdock said.

## Climate impact of big builds assessed

Pipestone County Commissioner Luke Johnson said he sees the expanded reviews as an unfunded mandate on counties. He said that environmental reviews already cost about \$30,000 and that new climate requirements could add \$15,000 to the price tag. He's worried it could stymie development in rural areas.

"At what point is it so much that you think, 'Well, it's not really worth doing,' " Johnson said.

Others said the changes need to happen faster and objected to a pilot project as a serious delay given the urgency of the climate crisis.

In an interview, Kathleen Schuler, policy director at the nonprofit Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate, expressed impatience with a pilot project.

"It feels like just requiring this type of information ... is like a very small step and they're not even taking that small step," Schuler said.

Dramatic action is needed, she said, pointing to the recent joint statement by more than 200 medical journals calling climate change the greatest threat to human health and the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

"The IPCC report that came out is code red for humanity," Schuler said.

Amelia Vohs, a lawyer at the nonprofit Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, called the EQB's move a step in the right direction.

"One of the most basic changes we can make is simply to consider the climate impacts of a new proposal before we make a decision on it," Vohs said.

Vohs also asked the board Wednesday to modify the worksheet to require developers to specify which common mitigation efforts they considered but did not choose, and why they didn't include them in their project design. It creates a dialogue, she said.

"If there's one way to make it more meaningful, that's it."

On average, about 100 projects a year across Minnesota undergo a review with an environmental assessment worksheet, most of them done by local governments and not a state agency. It's not clear how many will voluntarily participate next year.

Kelliher said outreach is underway through the Association of Minnesota Counties and League of Minnesota Cities.

Officials from Carver County and St. Paul told the board Wednesday they are interested in participating.

Darin Mielke, deputy county engineer for Carver County, told the board feedback from local governments will help ensure the revised form doesn't create an undue burden for them. He said he is interested in using it on the next phase of the Hwy. 212 project, which includes expanding 5 miles of the highway from two to four lanes.

In an interview, Kim Havey, director of sustainability for the city of Minneapolis, said he, too, supports the changes and that the city will use the new form in its review of the next large project. That could be the redevelopment of the old Kmart site on Lake Street, he said.

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