

Hennepin County steps up for climate

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Highlight: Extensive proposal offers strategies that would lead to a cleaner, healthier environment.

Body

Hennepin County is poised to adopt an ambitious plan to help curb **climate change** and meet significant environmental goals.

Research clearly shows that temperatures are **changing**. Minnesota is experiencing more precipitation and warmer winters. Following more than a year of research, community meetings and surveys of residents, the County Board developed a 59-page **Climate** Action Plan.

If adopted, Hennepin would become the first Minnesota county to develop a formal plan and could lead the way for other local units of government. Though the county has engaged in some environmental stewardship efforts such as recycling for years, the newly proposed strategies would smartly ramp up those programs.

The plan includes more than 200 strategies to reduce **climate change**. It includes transitioning to more electric and hybrid vehicles, adding bike lanes on county roads, and making county buildings more energy efficient.

Why does that matter? Because, as the county plan describes, **climate change** poses significant risks to residents - including poor air quality and damage to infrastructure and natural resources. Those problems warrant a "significant and coordinated response," the report states.

Hennepin County Board chair Marion Greene said county officials have not yet put a price tag on the strategies, but she added that failure to act would be even more costly.

"If we do nothing, there will be serious health and financial consequences," she told an editorial writer. Taking these actions will "make our communities healthier, our environment cleaner and more sustainable ... we need to be resilient and ready for the **changes** that will come."

Converting to an electric fleet of vehicles, Greene added, is a good example of the long-term benefits. The initial expense for the vehicles will be larger, but they will last longer, eliminate the cost of gas and won't pollute the air.

The plan also wisely addresses environmental disparities. The report notes that **climate change** has greater impact on low-income residents, people of color and the disabled. Those groups suffer more because they tend to live in areas that are most likely to flood and that have the worst air pollution.

The county is in good company with its efforts. The state is working to integrate more **climate change** measures into environmental impact reviews by requiring more information on greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation efforts.

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And some of the state's largest businesses have wisely stepped up to do their part because they understand the impact of **climate change** on their bottom lines. In a 2019 letter to the governor and legislative leaders, companies including General Mills, Cargill, Target and Best Buy outlined their renewable power, sustainable emissions and carbon neutrality goals and accomplishments.

Like those businesses, Hennepin County is a major employer in Minnesota with the potential to have a significant impact on **climate change**. The county plan is a draft, so the public can offer additional feedback before the board votes in April.

It's a proposal that merits support for the good it would do for residents and as a model for other local units of government.

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