

32 High-Impact Policy Options for Low-Carbon Cities

(February 2020: posted at <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/media/86>)

While Minnesota has made significant strides to mitigate climate change - renewable energy now accounts for 21% of in-state electricity generation - we missed the Legislature's 2015 greenhouse gas emission target and will miss the 2025 target without additional work. **Fully one-third of these state GHG emissions will be determined by and occur within cities.** 32 action options, focused on **policies cities can choose to adopt**, are recommended by the MN GreenStep Cities program for city consideration. Analysis shows that these 32 actions deliver (1) significant GHG reductions, (2) long-term and (for many actions) short-term cost savings, and (3) sustainability co-benefits such as improved quality of life for community members and environmental benefits such as improved local ecosystems. Actions supportive of these policies - such as community sustainability education and engagement, city green teams, annual reports to city councils, and work with the local school district and businesses - are included on the GreenStep web site.

See online model ordinances, policies and related resources linked to each policy option below. Each option is a unique GreenStep best practice action, whose number is noted.

Building Policy Options

- ❖ For existing buildings
 - [Use the State's B3](#) public building benchmarking tool to target energy-efficiency improvements {1.1}
 - [Require commercial building energy benchmarking](#) (using Hennepin Co. registry) to incentivize energy-efficiency improvements averaging about 1.7% per year {2.3}
 - [Require Truth-in-Housing](#) residential reporting to incentivize and better price more energy-efficient housing {2.3}
 - [Dedicate residential/commercial improvement](#) funding for energy efficiency and renewables {2.6}
- ❖ For new buildings
 - [Require the Sustainable Buildings 2030](#) state energy standard for city, and/or commercial/industrial, and/or residential properties that {3.3}
 - receive city financial support, and/or
 - require city regulatory approval (planned unit developments, conditional use permits, rezonings, variances)

Land Use Policy Options

- ❖ For one or more zoning districts
 - [Increase urban residential density](#) with accessory dwelling units, single-resident occupancy units, smaller lots, multi-family buildings by-right, senior housing, co-housing, low square-footage houses / apartments {7.2}
 - [Increase urban commercial density](#) by adopting floor-area ratio minimums/bonuses, zero lot-line setbacks {7.3}
 - [Adopt mixed-use zoning](#)/require mixed-use PUDs and/or a form-based zoning code/overlay district {8.3}
 - [Stage city-edge development](#) with an adequate public facilities (concurrency) ordinance {10.2}
 - [Zone for rural residential](#) clusters; adopt density bonuses, authorize transfer/purchase of development rights {10.4}

Transportation Policy Options

- ❖ For living streets
 - [Adopt a complete streets policy](#) that includes street design standards & maximizes urban tree canopy {11.1}
 - [Expand transit](#) / transit hubs and use expansions over time to meet increasing mode-shift targets {12.6}
 - [Improve bike/walk](#) infrastructure over time, by means such as lane reconfigurations (road diets), separated bike lanes, to meet increasing mode-shift targets {12.1} and {11.6}
- ❖ For downtown, commercial nodes, corridors
 - [Reduce or eliminate parking minimums](#), add parking maximums, develop district parking {14.1}
 - [Price curb & structured parking](#) to aim for a 15% vacancy rate in parking spaces on each block face, and to favor pay-per use vs. monthly contracts in shared lots/ramps and electric vehicles {14.1}

- [Allocate boulevard & curb space](#) for bike parking, separated bike lanes, vehicle passenger/freight pick-up/drop-off as part of planning for shared mobility services: bus, taxi, Uber/Lyft, autonomous vehicles {6.5}
- [Adopt a travel demand management / transit-oriented development](#) ordinance {14.4}
- [Require electric vehicle charging](#) capacity (“make-ready standards”) in new commercial/single, multi-family developments and require the installation of charging stations to mirror the regional electric vehicle adoption rate {3.4}
- [Prioritize fiber](#) telecommunications infrastructure {12.5}

Carbon Sequestration and Waste Reduction Policy Options

- [Adopt urban tree canopy](#) coverage and diversity goals that increase over time {16.3}
- [Implement organics collection](#) (residential food and yard waste) and associated composting {22.5}
- [Provide food waste prevention assistance and](#) food waste management assistance to help restaurants, to help food stores rescue food for food shelves, to help make food-to-hogs arrangements, and to increase food waste composting {25.2}
- [Increase materials reuse](#) with dedicated city staff time and funding to support second-hand/repair stores, Fix-it Clinics, organized garage sales, organized scavenging before large-item trash collection, Community Education classes {22.4}
- [Adopt a construction and demolition waste ordinance](#) that requires a level of recycling and reuse for building materials {22.8}

Energy Use/Supply Policy Options

❖ For city operations

- [Increase renewable energy](#) purchases/installed generation capacity over time to meet a net-zero greenhouse gas goal; purchases via community solar gardens, renewable energy credits or other means; generation via solar panels and anaerobic digestion, on city buildings and at waste-water treatment plants {15.2} and {26.5}
- [Adopt a sustainable purchasing policy](#) that prioritizes energy-efficient, low-impact products and services, such as electric vehicles, for city operations {15.1} and {13.3}

❖ For community-wide

- [Adopt wind energy and/or biomass ordinances](#) that allow, enable or encourage appropriate renewable energy installations {26.1}
- [Certify as a solar-ready community](#), including an expedited permit process for residents and businesses to install solar energy systems {26.7}
- [Participate with utilities](#) in their energy-efficiency/renewable energy programs for residential customers {2.1}
- [Adopt a Property-Assessed Clean Energy](#) resolution to facilitate commercial energy-efficiency / renewable energy financing {26.3}
- [Assess district energy/co-generation](#) system options on a periodic basis for feasibility {26.6}
- [Adopt \(if a municipal utility\)](#) accelerating targets for renewable energy generation to meet a net-zero greenhouse gas goal {6.5}

Options selected from a review of:

- *Best Practice Actions and City Action Reports* (MN GreenStep Cities program: 2019) at <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us>
- *Climate Solutions and Economic Opportunities* (MN Environmental Quality Board: 2017) at <https://www.egb.state.mn.us/content/climate-change>
- *High Impact Practices* (Urban Sustainability Directors Network: 2019) at <https://www.usdn.org/public/page/6/Projects>
- *Focused Acceleration: A Strategic Approach to Climate Action in Cities to 2030* (C40 Cities: 2017) at <https://www.c40.org/researches/mckinsey-center-for-business-and-environment>
- *Drawdown Solutions* (Project Drawdown: 2017) at <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions-summary-by-rank>