



The Honorable Tim Walz
Governor of the State of Minnesota

The Honorable Peggy Flanagan
Lt. Governor of the State of Minnesota

Members of the Minnesota Senate

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives

June 15, 2020

RE: Environment and Conservation Community Priorities for Special Session 2020 to Build the Health and Prosperity of Minnesota's Communities

Dear Elected Officials of Minnesota:

Minnesota is navigating through a cascading number of crises right now, only one of which – the COVID-19 crisis – is new, but many others of which are not, and we are only more acutely seeing impacts of continued neglect and inadequate response by our society to this point:

- the historical and ongoing structural racism crisis
- the police brutality crisis
- the farm crisis
- the healthcare crisis, and
- the climate crisis.

Events of the last days, weeks and months have shown us more clearly than ever how all of our issues are inter-related and can compound hardship for the most impacted communities, particularly communities of color and communities with less wealth.

This special session, Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP) wants to share three broad capital investment goals to meet this moment. We support a bonding bill that:

- **expands beyond usual limits and makes significantly greater investments** in the future of our state, with strong support for customary projects impacting our environment and natural resources like water, transit and natural lands.
- **provides resources for the planning and rebuilding of neighborhoods** that have suffered significant loss and destruction.
- **advocates for equitable and inclusive procurement and hiring in all contracts** to ensure rebuilding also addresses underrepresented and underserved communities in Greater Minnesota and in the Twin Cities metro area.

Bonding for the Health and Prosperity of Minnesota Communities

This year's bonding can help rebuild Minnesota's communities and economy in ways that smartly address multiple crises at the same time:

- help neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul rebuild to achieve their vision for safe, prosperous and sustainable communities
- invest in the physical health of communities by lowering pollution while also lowering operating costs for cities and local businesses and families
- provide thousands of training and job opportunities across the state in diverse and wide-ranging industries for Minnesotans
- lower our state's greenhouse gas emissions trajectory.

With unprecedented need and historically low interest rates, we support a larger bonding bill across the board – to take care of our communities, now and into the future.

In particular, we advocate for these critical investments in the following 4 areas:

1) Community Planning and Redevelopment in Minneapolis and St. Paul:

Neighborhoods need to be given resources to plan together and then rebuild their spaces, local businesses, streets, parks, homes, options for transit and more to meet the vision residents develop for their own neighborhoods and communities. These resources should be paired with language to ensure that all construction projects include measures for equitable purchasing and hiring practices designed to benefit the most impacted local communities, particularly people of color and indigenous workers and business owners.

2) Statewide Transit Projects: \$75 million for BRT; \$10 million for Greater MN; EV Charging:

No matter where you live, transit is the lifeblood of a community – how people get to their job, their school, their retail, their healthcare. Efficient transit will be invaluable to communities where workers need to travel farther to find jobs that have been lost. Access to transit projects should expand the availability and accessibility of transit for Minnesotans of all incomes and abilities.

Greater Minnesota Transit Capital Program: \$10 million

Metro Area Bus Rapid Transit: \$75 million

- B Line and D Line Construction: A minimum of \$55 million in state funds to build two arterial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects, which are fully designed and ready to build:
 - B Line, connecting Uptown Minneapolis to Downtown St. Paul
 - D Line, connecting the Mall of America through Minneapolis to Brooklyn Center

Following on the success of the A Line and C Line projects, these projects will provide choice for commuters, increase equitable access to jobs and reduce air pollution.

- Pre-design and Design: In addition to constructing the B and D lines, there is a strong likelihood that a federal stimulus bill will provide opportunities for funding other needed transit. To avoid missing out on getting our share of Federal dollars coming back to Minnesota, and to successfully compete against other states, we must invest in pre-design and design so that our projects are as close to “shovel ready” as possible.

We also support doubling the proposed grants to local governments to \$24 million to install electric vehicle fast-charging networks so that all communities can benefit from the economic activity that will surround this transportation transformation.

3) Water Infrastructure of at least \$300 million plus pilots using Renewable Energy:

In communities across the state, investments in water infrastructure made 60 – 70 years ago served us well, and now need to be repaired and replaced. Pipes are leaking and drinking and wastewater facilities need to be upgraded to protect the health of communities served by them and every other community downstream.

Cities and towns are facing severe revenue shortfalls due to the COVID-19 crisis. Enabling water treatment facilities to run on renewable energy would save towns and cities money. Water treatment facilities are energy intensive and often the largest consumer of energy for a municipality. Incorporating a renewable energy supply into the building is a bondable expense for new or significant construction. This is a singular opportunity to shift ongoing operating costs felt by cities into the construction phase funding package in a way that would save the city or town money usually spent on energy costs each year into the future. Reduce energy costs, not jobs, by putting renewables to work on water infrastructure.

4) Land Use that Supports Farmers and Sequesters Carbon: at least \$46.5 million

Minnesota's farmers are facing crises at every turn: crop prices, unstable markets, unusual weather patterns filled with more intense extremes from climate change. This is the only sector that can go from being an emitter of carbon using current ag practices to a carbon sink. Natural climate solutions that sequester carbon in plants and soil through photosynthesis could mitigate over 33% of Minnesota's statewide CO2 emissions.

CREP: \$16.5 million.

CREP is a program that leverages federal dollars to strategically enroll agricultural cropland into long term land conservation programs to protect and enhance natural systems.

Natural Lands Program: at least \$30 million.

Investments in Minnesota's forest, prairie grassland, and wetland habitats would help Minnesota meet its climate goals and protect and restore wildlife and natural habitats. We support investments in Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, Native Prairie Bank, Scientific and Natural Areas, Forests for the Future, State Reforestation, State Forest Acquisition and grants to cities for planting shade trees.

Now is the time to rebuild Minnesota's communities better than they were before. Bonding by its nature is an investment in our future. Let's make sure the future we are building serves us all in all of the ways we need; by providing good jobs that build strong communities, securing a clean environment that enables good health, and helps meet the climate change imperative before us.

Sincerely,



Executive Director

(and the 18 organizations on the reverse)

Canon River Watershed Partnership

Clean Water Action - Minnesota

CURE

Environment Minnesota

Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas

Friends of the Mississippi River

Honor the Earth

Izaak Walton League – Minnesota Division

Lands Stewardship Project

League of Women Voters – Minnesota

League of Women Voters – Upper Mississippi River Region

Mankato Area Environmentalists

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

MN350

Move MN

Pollinator Friendly Alliance

Renewing the Countryside

Vote Climate