2023 CGMC Policy Positions: Environment & Energy

Water Standards, Regulations and Permitting

1. CGMC supports cleaning up and protecting Minnesota's waters. Cities' limited financial resources must, however, be spent wisely on those projects leading to the greatest environmental benefits. The water quality regulations, permits, and other restrictions affecting cities must be grounded in solid peer-reviewed science and must be established and implemented in a public and transparent manner that respects the due process rights of cities and other interested stakeholders. To accomplish these goals the CGMC supports legislative, regulatory, and/or legal action to accomplish the following objectives:

    a. Pursuing innovative methods such as integrative planning, adaptive management, and pollutant trading to address water quality issues in the most cost-effective manner;
    b. Updating outdated standards to reflect current science;
    c. Analyzing the economic and environmental benefits of new or amended water quality regulations and permit requirements impacting our cities and using that information to improve outcomes;
    d. Requiring site-specific analyses when translating standards into permit requirements;
    e. Ensuring meaningful stakeholder engagement and transparency when developing and implementing standards and other requirements that impact cities;
    f. Requiring that memoranda, analyses, directives, and other documents that are incorporated into permits be subject to independent technical review and public comment before they become regulatory requirements; and
    g. When necessary, opposing the adoption or implementation of unreasonable standards, regulations, directives, and permit requirements

2. CGMC advocates for a more comprehensive clean water framework that better incorporates municipal wastewater and stormwater regulatory programs into the statewide watershed approach to address water pollution in the state in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner, relying on reductions from both point and non-point sources. Maximum flexibility with respect to achieving water quality goals should be encouraged including collaborative public-private partnerships, point to non-point source trading, and other local and market-based solutions.

3. CGMC advocates for the adoption of state-wide and other stream-lined variance procedures to provide municipalities relief from the burden of expensive water quality standards. CGMC further supports eliminating the fees and associated costs on municipal variance applications.

4. CGMC supports the authority of cities to regulate or prohibit private wells within municipal service boundaries and opposes any attempt to restrict or remove that authority.

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Funding Issues

5. CGMC supports increased funding for the construction, reconstruction, and improvement of municipal wastewater, drinking water, stormwater, and sewer facilities in Greater Minnesota—and broadening the criteria, increasing the cap, and increasing the state portion of water infrastructure programs.

6. CGMC supports using the state general fund to support the MPCA water program. Using the general fund, rather than relying heavily on fees, promotes legislative oversight and spreads the cost of regulation to everyone who benefits. CGMC will not oppose reasonable fee increases if those increases are infrequent, are tied to specific outcomes, and are coupled with an increase in general fund dollars for the same water quality programs.

7. In response to the significant need for clean water infrastructure funding CGMC supports a constitutional amendment dedicating up to 50% of the proceeds from the Minnesota Lottery to Public Facility Authority programs. Support for a constitutional amendment is conditioned on this money being matched by additional state support for the PFA on a one-to-one basis.

8. CGMC supports the state making more resources available to cities to develop voluntary resiliency plans and associated infrastructure in the face of climate change and extreme weather events, but not at the expense of adequately funding the Public Facilities Authority's existing water infrastructure programs.

9. Lead pipes continue to pose a human health hazard to thousands of Minnesotans and required removal or replacement of lead pipes incurs significant costs. CGMC supports state funding to assist cities with the completion of EPA required inventories of lead pipes and the replacement of lead pipes identified for removal by those inventories.

10. Environmental infrastructure is growing increasingly technical and complex to implement. CGMC supports the creation and funding of a technical assistance program that would allow local governments to develop long-term plans for their wastewater, drinking water and other water infrastructure needs.

General Environmental Policies

11. Minnesota's Legacy Amendment dedicates a portion of the sales and use tax to funding parks and trails. Regional parks and trails play an important role in improving the quality of life throughout Minnesota. CGMC supports a funding formula that allocates at least 20% to regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota and opposes any formula changes

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that reduce that share. In addition, CGMC supports allocating general fund dollars to the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission so that it can continue development of a system plan, evaluating funding requests, and executing other duties to promote the regional parks and trails system in Greater Minnesota.

11. Aquatic and terrestrial invasive species threaten the lakes, rivers, and parks of Greater Minnesota. The advance of these species may threaten the enjoyment of these resources by residents, impede tourism, and interfere with municipal water supplies. CGMC supports legislation targeted at slowing or stopping the spread of these species, including dedicating funding from the Legacy Amendment and other sources to address this issue.

12. Problem materials and manufactured pollutants entering the environment and municipal waste streams can threaten human health and the environment in our communities and cause physical damage to critical infrastructure such as drinking water facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, and sewer systems. CGMC believes that the responsibility for these contaminants rests with the manufacturers and supports legislation and regulations aimed at reducing, eliminating, or labeling these contaminants or products containing the contaminants. Efforts to monitor problem substances, including Per-and-Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), should focus on controlling the sources of those substances rather than the receivers, such as wastewater treatment plants. CGMC supports state funding to assist with voluntary PFAS monitoring efforts. CGMC opposes legislation that would impose liability under the Minnesota Environmental Response and Liability Act on local governments for the presence of PFAS in water, wastewater, or other municipal facilities.

13. CGMC supports requiring townships to meet the same environmental protections and regulatory requirements as cities.

Energy Policies

14. CGMC supports renewable energy and the transmission infrastructure necessary to develop these resources but recognizes that municipal owned utilities are in the best position to determine the resource mix needed to support the electrical needs of their communities and the appropriate pricing for those resources.

15. CGMC supports tax credits, grants, and other incentive programs to assist municipalities and their residents in developing and using alternative and renewable fuels. CGMC also supports state programs to assist municipalities in adopting energy conservation measures.

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