2050 WATER POLICY PLAN

Preliminary public comment summary

October 2024

IMAGINE 2050

the region's plan for an equitable and resilient future

Regional vision

A prosperous, equitable, and resilient region with abundant opportunities for all to live, work, play, and thrive.

Regional core values

Equity | Leadership | Accountability | Stewardship

Regional goals

Our region is equitable and inclusive
Racial inequities and injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities have been eliminated; and all people feel welcome, included, and empowered.

Our communities are healthy and safe
All our region's residents live healthy and rewarding lives with a sense of dignity and wellbeing.

Our region is dynamic and resilient
Our region meets the opportunities and challenges faced by our communities and economy including issues of choice, access, and affordability.

We lead on addressing climate change
We have mitigated greenhouse gas emissions and have adapted to ensure our communities and systems are resilient to climate impacts.

We protect and restore natural systems
We protect, integrate, and restore natural systems to protect habitat and ensure a high quality of life for the people of our region.

Public Comment period

The Metropolitan Council accepted public comments from August 15 through October 7 through various channels, including email, phone, mail, recorded message, an online comment portal, and a public hearing on September 25. During that time, more than 1,200 total comments were received from approximately 500 organizations and individuals. Specifically, the draft Water Policy Plan received approximately 111 comments from 14 cities, four counties, one state agency, and five additional partner organizations.

For individuals who commented on the draft Water Policy Plan and provided voluntary demographic data, the following data are available:

Gender

- 67% identified themselves as men
- 13% as women
- 6% as transgender
- 14% preferred not to answer.

Age

- 18-24: 8%
- 25-34: 38%
- 35-44: 8%
- 25-54: 15%
- 55-64: 15%
- 65-74: 8%
- 75-84: 8%

Summary of feedback

Major themes

- Appreciation for process to create the Water Policy Plan and for the general organization and comprehensive nature of the plan (some comments identified areas for improvement)
- Support for the objectives for the draft Water Policy Plan as identifying the critical areas to guide regional water goals; several agencies provided specific feedback
- Support for simplification (reduction) of the number of state and regional agencies that regulate water quality activities
- Desire for greater discussion of collaboration between government partners
- Greater coordination between conservation districts, watershed organizations, and other local agencies to address best practices, particularly related to agricultural areas
- Concerns about situation in the White Bear Lake area and ways coordination and planning can prevent it in the future
- Concerns about emerging contaminants
- Additional discussions about the roles that private and public entities play in various aspects of water quality, pollution prevention, and water management
- General support for Integrated Water Policy, desire for clarity on how that relates to authorities vested in state agencies
- General support for acknowledgement of climate change adaption and resilience relate to water resources management, including flooding and surface water
- Interest in greater safe water reuse and support for the concept
- General concern when the plan includes language related to water utilities
- Support for plan focus on protecting water quality and reducing stormwater impacts near infrastructure development, particularly riverfront areas
- Support for subregional work; requests for additional resources related to the designated areas and analysis

Note: In the Land Use policy sections of Imagine 2050, many cities provided feedback on their community designations, related density expectations, and how that related to their connections to the wastewater system. Staff will be reviewing those comments collaboratively and will have responses in the coming weeks.

Requests

- Additional clarification on specifically how the policies will impact local comprehensive planning
- Additional information regarding how wastewater system policies relate to land use planning and the Metropolitan Urban Services Area (MUSA)
- Some clarifications related to different definitions, including use of the term equity
- More information related to public health concerns related to water policy
- Include source water protection areas in comprehensive planning guidance
- More information about how technology may impact long-term planning and data
- Clarity about how the Priority Waters List might impact elements in the Water Policy Plan and prioritization on resources

Data from online comment portal

Question: How do you interact with water?

- Drinking water - 95%
- Recreation (swimming, fishing, boating, etc.) – 95%
- Cultural or social activities – 55%
- Other (please specify) – 9%
    - Irrigation
    - Appreciation for the beauty of nature

Question: How satisfied are you with the current work in the region being done on the following topics?

	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Highly dissatisfied
Water quality of lakes and rivers	18%	14%	18%	33%	5%
Addressing climate change impacts	24%	24%	24%	33%	0%
Safe/clean drinking water	33%	33%	14%	14%	5%
Water equity (including affordability and access to clean water)	20%	30%	25%	15%	10%

Question: What concerns do you have about water in your community?

I'm concerned about prioritizing car infrastructure over clean water on lakes and rivers. I'm concerned about continued privatization of shorelines and the accompanying degradation of riparian areas. I'm concerned about a lack of beavers in the water systems of the region. I'm concerned about aging dams and the harms they have done to water systems.
The lakes and their cleanliness. Drinking water in some areas are not good. Minneapolis water in my opinion is the best I've had throughout the state. Everywhere else, the water is subpar and now questionable with the Pfas concerns.
Contamination of drinking water and costs for it.
Continued development draining groundwater, and Met Council's insistence on more and more density. The Met Council is beholden to no one.
The continued use of groundwater in the White Bear Lake area is unsustainable. For over a decade nothing substantive has been done to resolve the problems associated with groundwater use. The DNR and the Metro Council need to push for solutions and work to force the municipalities to solve the problems. Local officials are not acting responsibly.
Pollution, especially forever chemicals. Lack of public access to water, especially swimming beaches. Public beaches are nearly always closed outside of core summer, they should always be open for swim at own risk.
I am concerned we are not doing enough to protect natural waterways.

Question: How important do you find each of these water objectives in meeting the regional goal?

	Important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important
Climate	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Investments	67%	17%	0%	17%	0%
Health	83%	17%	0%	0%	5%
Equity	33%	0%	50%	0%	17%

Question: How would you prioritize Met Council's work in these policy topics?

Tied for 1: Water Sustainability
Tied for 1: Clean and Abundant Water
3: Climate Chage
4: Integrated Water and Land Planning

Question: What actions caused you to rank policies as a higher priority?

Water sustainability and availability is vital to the safety and economic prosperity of our communities.
I think climate change is the number one issue of our time.
Clean and abundant water is something we can successfully implement changes on. To me, it is the lowest hanging fruit in the list of policies which can be more easily regulated, planned for, and policies implemented. I also think that the general public has a better grasp on what this policy might entail so there could be stronger support from the community members.
Water sustainability includes the core function of MCES, to provide efficient, effective and high-quality wastewater services to the Region.

Question: What actions caused you to rank policies as a lower priority?

Responding to and adapting to "climate change" is secondary to your primary reasonability of ensuring we do not run out of or mismanage our current supply of clean drinking water, i.e., water sustainability. We can be as green as we want and work on reducing our carbon emission; however, if our water supply become undrinkable or pumped out of state, what's the point of a few green initiative "feel-good" accolades, if our families have to ration water. Please focus on sustainability and availability.
I think the state already does a great job providing clean water.
I think climate change on our regional level will be realized with successfully implementing my top 3 policies
Planning, while necessary for good works, is not an action that improves the value of water systems.

Question: Based on your high priority topics, is there anything you hope is included as an action or in further detail?

Require local government water planning approval criteria to include equitable, sustainable, cost-efficient, long-term water and wastewater infrastructure for residents including metering and building permitting consistent with developer plan agreement plans. Assist residents whose water and wastewater infrastructure does not meet the above criteria to transition onto either public or individual private water / wastewater resource systems to ensure long term water utility stability and increase public trust in equitable water planning. Provide funding to residents to correct prior local water planning errors and plan for a sustainable future.
I think organic farming needs to become the only type of farming allowed. This would significancy reduce pesticide and herbicide run off into our waterways.
Reuse of wastewater needs more attention. It is not sustainable to pump aquifer water, use it once, and flush it down the Mississippi losing it for Minnesotans. What have we learned from the East Bethel plant's pumping effluent back into the ground; can more be built efficiently over time? Can we pump captured storm water into some aquifers - without significant pollution issues - to make up for the lost groundwater. Is it practical to incent water intensive businesses to use wastewater effluent?

I would like to see an MCES partnership looking at the potential and known impacts / risks (including thermal pollution) of the development of aquifer geothermal heat systems.
I would like to see a partnership developed across Minnesota academia, government and businesses to further water sustainability research here. Minnesota should start and host a "national water lab" (like has been hugely successful in energy research).

Question: Is there anything or any topics about the Met Council's policies that you were surprised to not see listed?

No

I was surprised that very little narrative is included about maintaining (and even improving) the efficiency of the wastewater operations - and the economic and environmental benefits to the Region therefrom.
Related to that it seems like: i) a policy to explicitly mention that wastewater rates on cities shall be based on approximate costs of service and ii) that wastewater fees collected shall not be used for non-wastewater functions...

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