

Green Zones in Minneapolis



Green Zones are a community-led approach to transforming neighborhoods overburdened with environmental hazards and limited economic opportunities. The goal of Green Zones is to target public and private investment into neighborhoods with the highest levels of pollution and environmental degradation – where people have been exposed to the toxic effects of pollutants from heavy industry, factories, and busy highways. These neighborhoods should be first in line for local, state and federal resources for parks, energy-efficiency, renewable energy and “green” small business entrepreneurship.

First Steps to Green Zones in Minneapolis

- **Minneapolis Climate Action Plan (MCAP), June 2013.** One of the first climate plans in the Midwest to address racial, social and economic disparities in housing, transportation and waste planning. The MCAP Environmental Justice Working Group worked to make sure health co-benefits were included and that Indigenous, low-income and communities of color would benefit. In March 2014, the City Council put Green Zones in their Minneapolis Climate Action Plan Two-year (2014-2015) Priorities:

“The Green Zone Initiative will create a city designation for neighborhoods, or clusters of neighborhoods that face the cumulative impacts of environmental, social, political and economic vulnerability. Green Zones are an environmental and economic development tool that targets new green infrastructure and retrofits for a specific area, in a comprehensive manner. Minneapolis Green Zones could correspond with targeted housing and commercial retrofit campaigns, to increase energy efficiency or boost renewable energy installation. Green Zone designated neighborhoods may be better positioned to access benefits offered by the city as well as state and federal agencies, ranging from targeted pollution reduction, to increased funding opportunities.” (Minneapolis Climate Action Plan, p. 15)

- **Minneapolis Community Environmental Advisory Commission (CEAC) Letter, February 2014.** This letter to the City Council and Mayor acknowledged environmental inequality in Minneapolis and recommended moving forward with a comprehensive Green Zones Initiative.
- **Minneapolis Energy Pathways Study, March 2014.** This study was the basis for the City’s Clean Energy Partnership with Xcel Energy and Center Point Energy:

“Communities identified as Green Zones, after an extensive screening process, may collaborate with the City and partners to create a community-based vision for improved sustainability and environmental justice. This may include working with the City planning office in devising a plan and goals, allocating funds or staff to support such a program, or connecting targeted communities with programs that will train and employ local residents to do the work that is needed.” (p. 24 and A-81)

References: California Environmental Justice Alliance Green Zones website (www.caleja.org/what-we-do/greenzones)
 Minneapolis Climate Action Plan website (www.minneapolismn.gov/sustainability/climate/index.htm)
 Minneapolis Environmental Justice Working Group Comments to Climate Action Plan (www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@citycoordinator/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-109371.pdf)
 Minneapolis Climate Action Plan Two-year priorities (www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-121064.pdf)
 CEED Green Zones website (www.ceed.org/greenzones/)

“Bringing Justice to Sustainability”