

Environmental review assistance for ETAC

Date: 4-16-24

To: Energy Transition Advisory Committee

From: Environmental Quality Board

RE: Environmental review assistance for community planning and projects

Background:

In December 2022 the Energy Transition Advisory Committee released its plan to assist energy transition communities in addressing the impacts of plant closures in Minnesota. The plan has five specific topics that are addressed: workforce, community engagement, tax base and financial incentives, re-use, and economic diversification.

The Environmental Quality Board (EQB) is a public-facing board with a mission to support informed decision-making on critical environmental issues. EQB is the coordinating body for Minnesota's environmental review program, established through the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) passed in 1973.

The environmental review program requires that certain types of projects undertake a review and analysis for potential environmental impacts through either an environmental assessment worksheet, environmental impact statement, or an alternative urban areawide review. This analysis helps to identify how the project will impact the environment, informs the community and allows the opportunity for comments, and identifies future permit needs. EQB staff provide technical assistance for environmental review.

As energy transition communities are likely to undertake multiple projects that need environmental review, we want to be sure we are offering appropriate technical assistance. EQB is hiring a staff person to provide dedicated technical assistance on projects that could trigger environmental review in energy transition communities. This staff person will prioritize assisting energy transition communities by creating and offering educational resources on the environmental review process. These educational resources can be fact sheets, presentations, technical assistance, or other needs identified by the energy transition communities. An example of assistance the staff person can provide would be offering assistance on environmental review needs that could result from commercial and industrial redevelopment, as identified in the re-use section of the plan; recommendations and strategies item 8. The staff person will also be a dedicated point of contact for these communities.

The staff person is expected to be hired by early summer. At that time, EQB will work with the Energy Transition executive director on connecting with the group to determine which types of assistance to prioritize.

If there are any questions please contact Colleen Hetzel for more information colleen.hetzel@state.mn.us or 651-757-2433.

