

CHAPTER 116G

CRITICAL AREAS

<p>Sec. 116G.01 Citation 116G.02 Policy 116G.03 Definitions 116G.04 Rules and regulations 116G.05 Criteria for the selection of areas of critical concern 116G.06 Designation 116G.07 Preparation, review, and approval of plans and regulations</p>	<p>Sec. 116G.08 Exceptions 116G.09 Failure to prepare and submit plans and regulations 116G.10 Updating and re-evaluation of plans and regulations 116G.11 Suspension of development 116G.12 Development permits 116G.13 Protection of landowners' rights 116G.14 Planning grants</p>
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116G.01 CITATION. Sections 116G.01 to 116G.14 shall be known as the critical areas act of 1973.

[1973 c 752 s 1]

116G.02 POLICY. The legislature finds that the development of certain areas of the state possessing important historic, cultural, or esthetic values, or natural systems which perform functions of greater than local significance, could result in irreversible damage to these resources, decrease their value and utility for public purposes, or unreasonably endanger life and property. The legislature therefore determines that the state should identify these areas of critical concern and assist and cooperate with local units of government in the preparation of plans and regulations for the wise use of these areas.

[1973 c 752 s 2]

116G.03 DEFINITIONS. Subdivision 1. As used in sections 116G.01 to 116G.14, the terms defined in this section have the meanings ascribed to them.

Subd. 2. "Council" means the Minnesota environmental quality council.

Subd. 3. "Local unit of government" means any political subdivision of the state, including but not limited to counties, municipalities, townships, together with all agencies and boards thereof.

Subd. 4. "Government development" means any development financed in whole or in substantial part, directly or indirectly, by the United States, the state of Minnesota, or agency or political subdivision thereof.

Subd. 5. "Regional development commission" means any regional development commission created pursuant to Minnesota Statutes 1971, Sections 462.381 to 462.396, inclusive and the metropolitan council created by Minnesota Statutes 1971, Chapter 473B.

Subd. 6. A "development permit" includes any building permit, zoning permit, water use permit, discharge permit, permit for dredging, filling or altering any portion of a watercourse, plat approval, re-zoning, certification, variance or other action having the effect of permitting any development as defined in sections 116G.01 to 116G.14.

Subd. 7. "Development" means the making of any material change in the use or appearance of any structure or land including but not limited to:

- (a) a reconstruction, alteration of the size, or material change in the external appearance of a structure on the land;
- (b) a change in the intensity of use of the land;
- (c) alteration of a shore or bank of a river, stream, lake or pond;
- (d) commencement of drilling (except to obtain soil samples), mining or excavation;
- (e) demolition of a structure;
- (f) clearing of land as an adjunct to construction;
- (g) deposit of refuse, solid or liquid waste, or fill on a parcel of land;
- (h) the dividing of land into three or more parcels.

Subd. 8. "Land" means the earth, water, and air, above, below or on the surface, and includes any improvements or structures customarily regarded as land.

MINNESOTA STATUTES 1974

1669

CRITICAL AREAS 116G.06

Subd. 9. "Parcel" of land means any quantity of land capable of being described with such definiteness that its location and boundaries may be established, which is designated by its owner or developer as land to be used or developed as a unit, or which has been used or developed as a unit.

Subd. 10. "Developer" means any person, including a governmental agency, undertaking any development as defined in sections 116G.01 to 116G.14.

Subd. 11. "Structure" means anything constructed or installed or portable, the use of which requires a location on a parcel of land. It includes a movable structure while it is located on land which can be used for housing, business, commercial, agricultural, or office purposes either temporarily or permanently. Structure also includes fences, billboards, swimming pools, poles, pipelines, transmission lines, tracks, and advertising signs.

[1973 c 752 s 3]

116G.04 RULES AND REGULATIONS. The council shall adopt such rules and regulations pursuant to chapter 15, as are necessary for the administration of sections 116G.01 to 116G.14.

[1973 c 752 s 4]

116G.05 CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF AREAS OF CRITICAL CONCERN. The council shall, in the manner provided in chapter 15, prepare criteria for the selection of areas of critical concern which have the following characteristics:

(1) An area significantly affected by, or having a significant effect upon, an existing or proposed major government development which is intended to serve substantial numbers of persons beyond the vicinity in which the development is located and which tends to generate substantial development or urbanization. (2) An area containing or having a significant impact upon historical, natural, scientific, or cultural resources of regional or statewide importance.

[1973 c 752 s 5]

116G.06 DESIGNATION. Subdivision 1. (a) The council shall periodically study and assess the resources and development of the state and shall recommend to the governor those areas that should be designated as areas of critical concern in accordance with criteria established in section 116G.05. In its recommendations, the council shall specify the boundaries of the proposed area of critical concern, state the reasons why the particular area proposed is of critical concern to the state or region, the dangers that would result from uncontrolled or inappropriate development of the area and the advantages that would be achieved from the development of the area in a coordinated manner and shall recommend specific principals for guiding the development of the area.

(b) Each regional development commission may from time to time recommend to the council areas wholly or partially within its jurisdiction that meet the criteria for areas of critical concern as defined in section 116G.05. Each regional development commission shall solicit from the local units of government within its jurisdiction suggestions as to areas to be recommended. A local unit of government in an area where no regional development commission has been established may from time to time recommend to the council areas wholly or partially within its jurisdiction that meet the criteria for areas of critical concern as defined in section 116G.05. The council shall provide the regional development commission or local unit of government with a written statement of its decision and the reasons therefor.

(c) Prior to submitting any recommendations to the governor, under subdivision 1, the council shall conduct a public hearing in the manner provided in chapter 15 on the proposed designation at a location convenient to those persons affected by such designation.

Subd. 2. (a) The governor may designate by written order all or part of the recommended areas as areas of critical concern and specify the boundaries thereof and shall notify all local units of government in which any part or parts of a designated area or areas of critical concern are located.

(b) The order designating an area of critical concern shall (1) describe the boundaries of the area of critical concern, (2) indicate the reason that a particular area is of critical concern, (3) specify standards and guidelines to be followed in preparing and adopting plans and regulations required in section 116G.07, and (4) indicate what development, if any, shall be permitted consistent with the policies of sections 116G.01 to 116G.14 pending the adoption of plans and regulations.

MINNESOTA STATUTES 1974

116G.07 CRITICAL AREAS

1670

(c) The order designating an area of critical concern shall be effective for no longer than three years pending approval by the legislature or by the regional development commission, where one exists, of each development region in which a part of the area of critical concern is located. After a regional development commission has approved the designation of an area of critical concern, it shall not revoke or rescind its approval, except as necessary to update and re-evaluate plans and regulations under section 116.G.10.

[1973 c 752 s 6]

116G.07 PREPARATION, REVIEW, AND APPROVAL OF PLANS AND REGULATIONS. Subdivision 1. (a) Within 30 days of receiving notification of the designation of an area or areas of critical concern within its jurisdiction, the local unit of government shall submit existing plans and regulations which deal with or affect the area or areas so designated to the appropriate regional development commission or to the council if no regional development commission has been established.

(b) If no plans or regulations exist, the local unit of government shall upon receiving notification of the designation of an area or areas of critical concern within its jurisdiction:

(1) Within six months of said notification prepare plans and regulations for the designated area or areas of critical concern and submit them to the appropriate regional development commission for review; or

(2) Within 30 days of said notification request that the appropriate regional development commission prepare plans and regulations for the area or areas of critical concern. Within six months of receipt of such request, the regional development commission shall prepare said plans and regulations and submit them to the council for review. If no regional development commission has been established, the local unit of government may request that the council prepare plans and regulations for adoption by the local unit of government.

Subd. 2. Within 45 days of receiving plans and regulations from the local unit of government under the provisions of subdivision 1, the regional development commission shall review the plans and regulations to determine their consistency with regional objectives and the provisions of the order designating the areas of critical concern and transmit its recommendations, together with the plans and regulations, to the council.

Subd. 3. (a) Within 45 days of receiving plans and regulations from the local unit of government or a regional development commission, the council shall review the plans and regulations to determine their consistency with the provisions of the order designating the area, the recommendations of the regional development commission, and the review comments of such state agencies as the council shall deem appropriate, and shall either approve the plans and regulations by written order or return them to the local unit of government or regional development commission for modification along with a written explanation of the need for modification.

(b) Plans and regulations which are returned to the local unit of government or regional development commission for modification shall be revised consistent with the instructions of the council and resubmitted to the council within 60 days of their receipt, provided that final revision need not be made until a formal meeting has been held with the council on the plans and regulations if requested by the local unit of government or regional development commission.

(c) Plans or regulations prepared pursuant to this section shall become effective when enacted by the local unit of government or, following legislative or regional development commission approval of the designation, upon such date as the council may provide in its order approving said plans and regulations.

[1973 c 752 s 7]

116G.08 EXCEPTIONS. (a) If, in the opinion of the council, the local unit of government is making a conscientious attempt to develop plans and regulations for the protection of a designated area or areas of critical concern within its jurisdiction, but the scope of the project is of a magnitude that precludes the completion, review, and adoption of the plans and regulations within the time limits established in section 116G.07, the council may grant an appropriate extension of time.

(b) If the council determines that a designated area or areas of critical concern is of a size and complexity that precludes the development of plans and regulations

by a local unit of government or a regional development commission, or that the development of plans and regulations requires the assistance of the state, the council shall direct the appropriate state agency or agencies to assist the local unit of government and the regional development commission in preparing the plans and regulations in accordance with a time schedule established by the council.

[1973 c 752 s 8]

116G.09 FAILURE TO PREPARE AND SUBMIT PLANS AND REGULATIONS.

Subdivision 1. Except as otherwise provided in section 116G.08, if any local unit of government fails to prepare plans and regulations that are acceptable to the council within one year of the order designating an area or areas of critical concern within its jurisdiction, the council shall prepare and, after conducting a public hearing in the manner provided in chapter 15 at a location convenient to those persons affected by such plans and regulations, adopt such plans and regulations applicable to that government's portion of the area of critical concern as may be necessary to effect the purposes of sections 116G.01 to 116G.14. If such plans and regulations are adopted, they shall apply and be effective as if adopted by the local unit of government. Notice of any proposed order issued under this section shall be given to all units of government having jurisdiction over the area of critical concern.

Subd. 2. Plans and regulations adopted by the council under this section shall be administered by the local unit of government as if they were part of the local ordinance.

Subd. 3. At any time after the preparation and adoption of plans and regulations by the council, a local unit of government may submit plans and regulations pursuant to section 116G.07 which, if approved by the council as therein provided, supersede any plans and regulations adopted under this section.

Subd. 4. If the council determines that the administration of the local plans and regulations are inadequate to protect the state or regional interest, the council may institute appropriate judicial proceedings to compel proper enforcement of the plans and regulations.

[1973 c 752 s 9]

116G.10 UPDATING AND RE-EVALUATION OF PLANS AND REGULATIONS. Subdivision 1. If a local unit of government finds it necessary or desirable to amend or rescind plans and regulations that have been approved by the council, it shall re-submit its plans and regulations, together with any recommended changes thereto, for review and approval by the council.

Subd. 2. Two years from the initial date of the council's approval of the plans and regulations of a local unit of government, or from the date of a review conducted under the provisions of subdivision 1, the local unit of government shall re-submit its plans and regulations, together with any recommended changes thereto, for review and approval by the council.

Subd. 3. Approval of amendments or rescission shall become effective only upon approval thereof by the council in the same manner as for approval of the original plans and regulations as provided in section 116G.07.

[1973 c 752 s 10]

116G.11 SUSPENSION OF DEVELOPMENT. Except as provided in section 116G.12, upon the designation of an area of critical concern, no local unit of government or state agency shall grant a development permit affecting any portion of the area except as otherwise specified in the order designating the area.

[1973 c 752 s 11]

116G.12 DEVELOPMENT PERMITS. Subdivision 1. If an area of critical concern has been designated by the governor pursuant to section 116G.06, a local unit of government shall grant a development permit only in accordance with the provisions of this section.

Subd. 2. If no plans and regulations for the area of critical concern have been adopted under the provisions of section 116G.07, the local unit of government shall grant a development permit only if

(a) the development is specifically permitted by the order designating the area of critical concern or is essential to protect the public health, safety, or welfare because of an existing emergency; and

(b) a local ordinance has been in effect immediately prior to the designation of the area of critical concern and a development permit would have been granted thereunder.

Subd. 3. If plans and regulations for an area of critical concern have become effective under the provisions of section 116G.07, the local unit of government shall permit development only in accordance with those plans and regulations.

Subd. 4. The local unit of government shall notify the council of

(a) any application for a development permit in any area of critical concern for which no plans or regulations have become effective under the provisions of section 116G.07; or

(b) any application for a special development permit in any area of critical concern for which plans and regulations have become effective under the provisions of section 116G.07.

[1973 c 752 s 12]

116G.13 PROTECTION OF LANDOWNERS' RIGHTS. Subdivision 1. Nothing in sections 116G.01 to 116G.14 authorizes any governmental agency to adopt a rule or regulation or issue any order that is unduly restrictive or constitutes a taking of real or personal property in violation of the constitution of this state or of the United States.

Subd. 2. Neither the designation of an area of critical concern nor the adoption of any regulations for such an area shall in any way limit or modify the rights of any person to complete any development that has been authorized by registration and recordation of a subdivision pursuant to state laws, or by a building permit or other authorization to commence development on which there has been reliance and a change of position, and which registration or recordation was accomplished, or which permit or authorization was issued prior to the date of notice for public hearing as provided by section 116G.06. If a developer has by his actions in reliance on prior regulations obtained vested or other legal rights that in law would have prevented a local government from changing those regulations in a way adverse to his interests, nothing in sections 116G.01 to 116G.14 authorizes any governmental agency to abridge those rights.

[1973 c 752 s 13]

116G.14 PLANNING GRANTS. The council shall prepare guidelines for dispersing funds to local units of government or regional development commissions for as much as 100 percent but not less than 50 percent of the non-federal cost of preparing and adopting plans and regulations for areas of critical concern pursuant to section 116G.07, for a period not to exceed five years from the date the legislature or regional development commissions approve the designation of an area of critical concern.

[1973 c 752 s 14]