Short Title: SEPA Reform. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Torbett, Hager, and Millis (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO REFORM AND AMEND THE STATE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT.
The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. G.S. 113A-4 reads as rewritten:
"§ 113A-4. Cooperation of agencies; reports; availability of information.
The General Assembly authorizes and directs that, to the fullest extent possible:

... (2) Every State agency shall include in every recommendation or report on any
action involving significant expenditure of public moneys or use of public
land for projects and programs significantly affecting the quality of the
environment of this State, a detailed statement by the responsible official
setting forth the following:

a. The direct environmental impact of the proposed action;
b. Any significant adverse environmental effects which cannot be
   avoided should the proposal be implemented;
c. Mitigation measures proposed to minimize the impact;
d. Alternatives to the proposed action;
e. The relationship between the short-term uses of the environment
   involved in the proposed action and the maintenance and
   enhancement of long-term productivity; and
f. Any irreversible and irretrievable environmental changes which
   would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented.

For purposes of this subdivision, a direct environmental impact does not
include impacts that are speculative, secondary, or cumulative with other
previous actions or that occur outside of the State.

(2a) Prior to making any detailed statement, the responsible official shall consult
with and obtain the comments of any agency which has either jurisdiction by
law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved.
The failure of an agency to provide comments within the comment period
established under this subdivision or to request an extension for a specific
period of time set forth in the request shall be treated by the responsible
official as a conclusion by that agency that there is no significant
environmental impact. Any unit of local government or other interested
party that may be adversely affected by the proposed action may submit
written comment. The responsible official shall consider written comment
from units of local government and interested parties that is received within
the established comment period. Copies of such detailed statement and such
comments shall be made available to the Governor, to such agency or
agencies as he may designate, and to the appropriate multi-county regional
agency as certified by the Secretary of Administration, shall be placed in the
public file of the agency and shall accompany the proposal through the
existing agency review processes. A copy of such detailed statement shall be
made available to the public and to counties, municipalities, institutions and
individuals, upon request.

SECTION 2. G.S. 113A-9 reads as rewritten:


As used in this Article, unless the context indicates otherwise, the term:

…

(7) "Public land" means all land and interests therein, title of which is vested in
the State of North Carolina, in any State agency, or in the State for the use of
any State agency or political subdivision of the State, and includes all vacant
and unappropriated land, swampland, submerged land, land acquired by the
State by virtue of being sold for taxes, escheated land, and acquired
land by any other manner of acquisition, or escheated land.

(7a) "Significant expenditure of public moneys" means expenditures of public
funds greater than twenty million dollars ($20,000,000) for a single project
or action or related group of projects or actions. For purposes of this
subdivision, contributions of funds or in-kind contributions by
municipalities, counties, regional or special-purpose government agencies,
and other similar entities created by an act of the General Assembly and
in-kind contributions by a non-State entity shall not be considered an
expenditure of public funds for purposes of calculating whether such an
expenditure is significant.

…

(11) "Use of public land" means land-disturbing activity of greater than 20 acres
that results in substantial, permanent changes in the natural cover or
topography of those lands that includes:

a. The grant of a lease, easement, or permit authorizing private use of
public land; or

b. The use of privately owned land for any project or program if (i) the
State or any agency of the State has agreed to purchase the property
or to exchange the property for public land and (ii) the use
meets the other requirements of this subdivision."

SECTION 3. G.S. 113A-10 reads as rewritten:


The policies, obligations and provisions of this Article are supplementary to those set forth
in existing authorizations of and statutory provisions applicable to State agencies and local
governments. In those instances where a State agency is required to prepare an environmental
document or to comment on an environmental document under provisions of federal law, no
separate environmental document shall be required to be prepared or published under this
Article so long as the environmental document or comment shall meet the provisions of
this Article."

SECTION 4. G.S. 113A-11 reads as rewritten:

§ 113A-11. Adoption of rules.

(a) The Department of Administration shall adopt rules to implement this Article.
(b) Each State agency may adopt rules that establish minimum criteria. An agency may include a particular action or class of actions in its minimum criteria only if the agency makes a specific finding that the action or class of actions has no significant long-term impact on the environment. Rules establishing minimum criteria shall be consistent with rules adopted by the Department of Administration. In addition to all other rule-making requirements, rules establishing minimum criteria are subject to approval by the Secretary of Administration."

SECTION 5. G.S. 113A-12 reads as rewritten:

"§ 113A-12. Environmental document not required in certain cases.

No Notwithstanding any other provision in this Article, no environmental document shall be required in connection with:

(1) The construction, maintenance, or removal of an electric power line, water line, sewage line, stormwater drainage line, telephone line, telegraph line, cable television line, data transmission line, or natural gas line, or similar infrastructure project within or across the right-of-way of any street or highway.

(2) An action approved under:
   c. A special order pursuant to G.S. 143-215.2 or G.S. 143-215.110.1.
   d. An action taken to address an emergency under G.S. 143-215.3 or other similar emergency conditions.
   e. A remedial or similar action to address contamination under Chapters 130A or 143 of the General Statutes, including a brownfield agreement entered into under G.S. 130A-310.32.
   g. An industrial or pollution control project approval by the Secretary of Commerce under Chapter 159C of the General Statutes.
   h. A project approved as a water infrastructure project under Chapter 159G of the General Statutes.
   i. A certification issued by the Division of Water Resources of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources under the authority granted to the Environmental Management Commission by G.S. 143B-282(a)(1).

(3) A lease or easement granted by a State agency for:
   a. The use of an existing building or facility.
   b. Placement of a wastewater line or other structures or uses on or under submerged lands pursuant to a permit granted under G.S. 143-215.1.
   d. A facility for the use or benefit of The University of North Carolina System, the North Carolina community college system, the North Carolina public school systems, or one or more constituent institutions of any of those systems.
   e. A health care facility financed pursuant to Chapter 131A of the General Statutes or receiving a certificate of need under Article 9 of Chapter 131E of the General Statutes.

(4) The construction of a driveway connection to a public roadway.

(5) Any State action in connection with a project for which public lands are used and/or public monies are expended if the land or expenditure is provided as solely for the payment of incentives an incentive for the project pursuant to an agreement that makes the incentive payments incentives
contingent on prior completion of the project or activity, or completion on a
specified timetable, and a specified level of job creation or new capital
investment.

(6) A major development as defined in G.S. 113A-118 that receives a permit
issued under Article 7 of Chapter 113A of the General Statutes.

... Facilities created in the course of facilitating closure activities under Part 2I
of Article 9 of Chapter 130A of the General Statutes.

(9) Facilities created in the course of facilitating closure activities under Part 2I
of Article 9 of Chapter 130A of the General Statutes.

(10) Any project or facility specifically required or authorized by an act of the
General Assembly.

(11) Any project undertaken as mitigation for the impacts of an approved project
or to mitigate or avoid harm from natural environmental change, including
wetlands and buffer mitigation projects and banks, coastal protections and
mitigation projects, and noise mitigation projects."

SECTION 6. G.S. 159G-38 reads as rewritten:


(a) Required Information. — An application submitted under this Article for a loan or
grant for a project must state whether the project requires an environmental assessment. If the
application indicates that an environmental assessment is not required, it must identify the
exclusion in the North Carolina Environmental Policy Act, Article 1 of Chapter 113A of the
General Statutes, that applies to the project. If the application does not identify an exclusion in
the North Carolina Environmental Policy Act, it must include an environmental assessment of
the project's probable impacts on the environment.

(b) Division Review. — If, after reviewing an application, the Division of Water
Infrastructure determines that a project requires an environmental assessment, the assessment
must be submitted before the Division continues its review of the application. If, after
reviewing an environmental assessment, the Division concludes that an environmental impact
statement is required, the Division may not continue its review of the application until a final
environmental impact statement has been completed and approved as provided in the North
Carolina Environmental Policy Act.

(c) Hearing. — The Division of Water Infrastructure may hold a public hearing on an
application for a loan or grant under this Article if it determines that holding a hearing will
serve the public interest. An individual who is a resident of any county in which a proposed
project is located may submit a written request for a public hearing. The request must set forth
each objection to the proposed project or other reason for requesting a hearing and must include
the name and address of the individual making the request. The Division may consider all
written objections to the proposed project, any statement submitted with the hearing request,
and any significant adverse effects the proposed project may have on the environment. The
Division’s decision on whether to hold a hearing is conclusive. The Division must keep all
written requests for a hearing on an application as part of the records pertaining to the
application."

SECTION 7. This act is effective when it becomes law.