

[2nd revision, May 26; word count: 479]

To concerned citizens of Northfield:

This open letter is on behalf of the 1,127 Northfield citizens who signed a petition between April 28 and May 14 in opposition to the 2023 Reclamation and Overlay Act. Soon after the petition's registration on May 15, the City Clerk informed us that it could not be considered valid due to several insufficiencies. This determination, however, was made erroneously on the basis of Minnesota Rule 8205.1010, which references solely the election or recall of potential or current holders of office. The appropriate point of reference would have been Minnesota Statute 475.58, which deals specifically with petitions for reverse referendums. The content of this statute differs radically from that of Rule 8205 and contains none of its detailed stipulations that the City Clerk cited as requirements.

Thus we can only conclude that the City Council continues to obstruct all our attempts at establishing honest, open communication with us, their constituents. Are Council members not public servants? Should public projects not have public input?

As over thirty of us made the rounds of Northfield neighborhoods to gather signatures, the most frequent comments we heard were:

- First and foremost, the poor condition of many of the city's streets must be taken care of
- Bikeway and sidewalk projects should be authorized on their own merits
- Northfield property taxes have increased by 50% over the past five years
- The City Council has approved a \$5.3 million bond issue to cover the costs of street projects, some of which are non-essential, and has a 5-year plan with a price tag of \$31 million for further expansion. These costs will all be borne by Northfield taxpayers
- Expanding Northfield's system of bikeways is a good idea, but such bikeways must be designed with greater consideration for safety and for the needs of a given neighborhood

Among the most egregious of the intrusive "improvements" to Northfield's biking network is the off-street two-way bikeway projected for Heritage

Drive and Lincoln Street South. The reconfiguration of these streets in order to accommodate this type of bikeway would be excessively expensive since it would require the repositioning of infrastructure, the use of massive amounts of concrete, as well as the shortening of driveways by half their current length.

In addition, the protected two-way bikeways scheduled for Roosevelt Drive and Maple Street represent a model not yet seen in Northfield. Such bikeways are appropriate for high-traffic streets in large cities, where it is important to separate bike lanes by means of a barrier from the more rapidly moving automobile traffic. These streets clearly do not fit this category.

In conclusion let us bear in mind that our Mayor often speaks of the need for dialogue between the City Council and the citizens it represents. In our experience, however, this has not been forthcoming. Is this the kind of government Northfield wants?