

To All Concerned:

The High Winds Fund has received two emails asking about our role and purpose for participating in the funding of a landscaped pedestrian refuge median between Moore and Cleveland.

The mission of the High Winds Fund is to “*maintain and enhance the beauty, serenity and security of the Macalester neighborhood.*” The High Winds Fund defines its neighborhood as anything within reasonable walking distance of the Macalester College campus with boundaries of I-94 on the north, the Mississippi River on the west, Randolph Avenue on the south and Lexington Parkway on the east.

In its last strategic plan, the High Winds Fund identified pedestrian safety, traffic calming and enhancing alternative transportation among its top five priorities to pursue. The Marshall Avenue medians are but one of many projects we have supported in recent years including the Grand Avenue median, Snelling Avenue medians, the Jefferson Avenue bikeway, numerous traffic circles and enhanced pedestrian safety infrastructure at many intersections throughout our program area. We give financial support to bike/walk advocacy organizations for their work within the Union Park and Macalester-Groveland neighborhoods, including St. Paul Smart Trips and Transit for Livable Communities. We also sponsor a Nice Ride bike station and an HourCar hub.

The High Winds Fund has been an active supporter of the median sections that have already been built on Marshall. We also advocated for adding bike lanes back when Ramsey County was doing their mill & overlay work. The small section of median between Moore and Cleveland is but one piece of a bigger effort to transform Marshall from a raceway for vehicular traffic to a calmer, more attractive street that is friendly to bikers, walkers, transit users and vehicles.

On principle, we would never advocate for a road treatment or pedestrian safety infrastructure in the larger Macalester neighborhood that we would not be willing to have on our own doorstep. To wit: we have provided funding, advocacy and organizational support for pedestrian refuge medians on Grand Avenue between Snelling & Macalester Street, on Snelling for the half mile stretch between Grand and St. Clair Avenues and, more recently, on Snelling between Summit & Grand Avenues. All three medians have been a huge success for pedestrian safety and for the destination retail nearby. In fact, two additional retail spaces have made their home at Grand & Snelling since the medians were built and two existing businesses are expanding their operations. I am attaching a list of studies that debunk the claim that businesses suffer because of the addition of landscaped medians. It is simply not the case and it has not been the experience of businesses on Grand & Snelling.

Median opponents have cited accidents near existing medians as a reason not to build the section at Wilder. Accidents are inevitable, there will be accidents. Medians are about building safer infrastructure for pedestrians – and reducing the likelihood of accidents between vehicles and pedestrians. The situation at Marshall and Wilder is ideal for reducing vehicular-pedestrian conflicts. At the signalized intersection one block west, pedestrians have to deal with right turns in two directions, left turns and both east and westbound traffic. Even with controls, the

signalized intersection can be complicated and dangerous for pedestrians. One block east, with medians installed, left turns restricted and a median refuge, pedestrians will only have to deal with one direction of traffic at a time – reducing a north/south crossing from three potential vehicular-pedestrian conflicts to one potential conflict at a time. Similarly, a pedestrian will have to cross four lanes of traffic (including turn lanes) while making the crossing at the signalized intersection and will have to cross only two lanes, each independently, at Wilder. It may not seem like much of an improvement for an able-bodied, young adult but it is a huge difference for children, the elderly and anyone with any kind of physical impairment – or anyone accompanying one of these individuals.

The road treatment proposed for Marshall Avenue east of Cleveland is cited by the State of Minnesota as a ‘best practices’ way to improve pedestrian safety. We have tremendous trust in our Public Works traffic engineers based on our extensive experience with them. Traffic engineers do not propose or build pedestrian infrastructure that is unsafe. At the High Winds Fund we have taken a “hands off” approach to deciding the specific placement of median sections and to the decisions about which left turns should be restricted. Public Works has the experience, the ability to do modeling and the professional training to analyze these questions. In our experience, they do a magnificent job of balancing the needs of street users of all kinds and the impacts new infrastructure has in its surrounding environment.

A few people in the community have suggested that this project has been brought about suddenly and secretly without much support from the community. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The High Winds Fund staff has been involved with traffic calming on Marshall Avenue for nearly ten years, working several hundred individuals from Merriam Park. There have been over 30 public meetings over nine years and some 2000 fliers distributed to homes on the blocks north and south of Marshall between Snelling and the river – along Marshall, Iglehart, Carroll, Dayton and Selby. Businesses between Wilder and Cleveland have been invited to participate for nearly ten years but some chose not to participate until the last few weeks. Claims of “last minute” or “springing” this on residents don’t hold up when one looks at the dozens of Villager articles covering the public meetings that have taken place over the last decade. A summary of the public participation is attached to this email.

We are pleased that the City of St. Paul has been able to identify funds to match the grant that The High Winds Fund put on the table over a year ago to help complete the process of making Marshall Avenue a safer, greener street for all its users.

Tom Welna

Director, The High Winds Fund