

August 15, 2012

Saint Paul City Council  
15 Kellogg Blvd., West  
Room 310  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Councilmembers Bostrom, Brendmoen, Carter, Lantry, Stark, Thune, and Tolbert,

I am writing to express my opinion about the Charles Avenue redesign proposal that will be coming before the City Council on Wednesday, September 5, 2012. As you may know, I have been involved in this project for over two years with a group of Frogtown and Hamline-Midway residents. In 2010 we named our initiative “Central Corridor Friendly Streets.” We have been active in public engagement for the past two years. Among the highlights of our work were a series of block parties along Charles Avenue (three in Frogtown, two in Hamline-Midway) throughout the Summer of 2011. These block parties drew hundreds (over 700) of residents. At those block parties, we displayed 23 images of various infrastructure and placemaking concepts, asking people to give their opinions about what they would like to see on Charles Avenue. We also asked attendees to complete surveys to express their opinions about traffic on Charles and what changes should occur on the Avenue. CCFS also partnered with Springboard for the Arts at these block parties, as a way to enliven the creative imagination of residents as a form of community building, as well as to demonstrate the multifaceted ways that residents can engage in placemaking. Also, we supported restaurants on University Avenue by hiring several to cater our block parties. These block parties were energizing, informative, educational, and fun. They were a true expression of the kind of pride that everyday folks have in Frogtown and Hamline-Midway.

What was special and effective about the block parties was that *we were bringing the ideas to people*, to where they live, making it as simple as walking out one’s front door or walking down the block to participate. This is in contrast to asking resident to go somewhere else and attend a more typical meeting. Consequently, *the block parties were representative of who actually lives in the neighborhoods* (in comparison to those who are likely to attend more standard public forums).

The volume of data we gathered at those block parties – 1700 opinions, over 200 surveys – was staggering and took months to analyze. This analysis may be found in “Central Corridor Friendly Streets: Report on Phase 1” (distributed January 2012). We also held three events in 2012 to gain opinions about median closures at the major arterials, placemaking, mid-block features, ‘greenstreets’ concepts, and other ideas (see “Central Corridor Friendly Streets: Report

2” distributed June 2012). All told, CCFS has reached out to almost 900 people over eight events, gathering over 2400 opinions and over 200 surveys. [These figures do not include the public engagement efforts that the City and CCFS partnered on in July 2012.]

What we learned at our eight events was the following:

- Residents want less automotive traffic on Charles Avenue
- Residents want the automotive traffic that is on Charles to move more slowly
- Residents want to feel safer on Charles Avenue, and to worry less about their children on Charles
- Residents want to be able to safely cross larger arterials on foot and by bicycle
- Residents want placemaking and other creative street design features (i.e., intersection paving; landscaped traffic circles)
- Residents want greening features, including permeable pavement, landscaping, and gardens
- Residents support changes that allow for walkers and bicyclists to use Charles safely

In short, our data shows two overwhelming patterns:

1. That residents support infrastructural changes that are consistent with pedestrian-bicycling boulevard concepts, as well as placemaking features that make a street and neighborhood unique and an expression of ‘pride in place’.
2. That the redesign of Charles Avenue must attend not just to the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists and others moving through Frogtown and Hamline-Midway, but also the needs of residents who live in both neighborhoods. *A new Charles must emphasize stopping and experiencing, as well as moving through.*

Once we reviewed the data and discovered these patterns, CCFS turned attention to advocating for changes, seeking to bring to fruition what we heard from residents.

Until recently, this process and our work has been productive and smooth. For example, due to the compelling work we did last summer, Transit for Livable Communities (TLC) selected the Friendly Streets Initiative as one of twelve projects (out of over 60 proposals) awarded support in the form of technical engineering and planning consultation from Toole Design Group (TDG). TDG dutifully utilized the insights we gained from our public engagement processes, coupled with their vast expertise, to formulate the proposal that is before you today. In other words, TDG, at the behest of TLC, took seriously community input developed in 2011 and 2012 to create a redesign plan that addresses the needs of residents of Frogtown and Hamline-Midway, while also achieving the City’s transportation goals.

What has occurred more recently, and which threatens to overshadow the extraordinary community work that has been going on for over two years, are the objections of a single person, Mr. Richard Purcell. Mr. Purcell has launched an 11<sup>th</sup> hour attack on the project based on flawed arguments and a total ignorance of what the community has been working on for the last two years. Due to his efforts to try to create controversy where there is none, I feel the need to

address the issues raised by Mr. Purcell. I do so because residents have spent years trying to build something for Frogtown and Hamline-Midway, and we are dismayed that one person could threaten that.

I will address the two main claims that Mr. Purcell has made in regard to the introduction of a median refuge for pedestrians and bicyclists at Charles and Snelling. First, that Mr. Purcell's customers, (2/3rds of which come from north of St. Paul), will not be able to figure out how to get to his business without a southbound left-turn option onto Charles from Snelling. Second, that he and other businesses near that intersection have been unaware of the Charles redesign project until very recently.

On point one: Mr. Purcell's business is a destination business. One *plans* to go to a funeral home. If one needs the services of Mr. Purcell's funeral home, with minimal effort one will be able to find the way to Mr. Purcell's parking lot, even with a median refuge at the intersection of Snelling and Charles. Given what we are trying to achieve at Snelling – a safe way for people to cross the street – making simple wayfinding changes to Mr. Purcell's business would take minimal effort. In the view of CCFS, the safety of residents who live near that intersection and are seeking to cross the street safely, as well as others (such as bicyclists) who are traveling the length of Charles Avenue, ranks as a higher consideration than the minor inconvenience (if it can even be called that) of Mr. Purcell's customers. *Safety ranks higher than convenience.*

On point two: Mr. Purcell claims that he was not aware of the Charles Avenue redesign effort until about a month ago. He claims, though has yet to provide proof, that other business owners were similarly unaware of the plans to redesign Charles Avenue. If this is true, and I will assume that it is, then that means that he (and presumably other business persons):

- never read CCFS fliers from last year's promotions of the block parties
- did not read the Hamline-Midway newsletters from last year that ran stories about our block parties
- did not look at Frogtown Neighborhood Association's website, Hamline-Midway Coalition's website, the City's website, the Funders Collaborative website, Transit for Livable Communities website, and other websites (e.g., Facebook) where the Charles project has been discussed *for well over a year*
- did not attend District 11 meetings
- did not attend the CCFS block parties of 2011
- never read "CCFS: Report on Phase 1" which has been distributed in January 2012 and posted online
- did not attend the three events we had this year, including the Hamline Heartwood Festival
- never read "CCFS: Report 2" which was distributed in June 2012
- did not read the Bike Walk Twin Cities article on CCFS by Steven Clark, June 13 2012
- did not read the City of St. Paul's postcards announcing public meetings, sent early July 2012
- did not read the *Monitor* article about CCFS by Michael Jon Olson, published July 10 2012

There have been multiple opportunities to become aware of the project. It is plausible that if CCFS had not hand-delivered a flier to his business this past July -- which is when Mr. Purcell *finally* became aware of the project -- Mr. Purcell would have only become aware when construction began.

People and organizations, if they claim to be about the community, **must take personal responsibility** for keeping themselves informed. Paying attention to the external environment is part of the success of any organization. Savvy organizations pay attention to changes around them, know how to adapt, and to turn such changes into business opportunities.

On either point -- that people cannot figure out how to drive to his business without a southbound left-hand turn at Charles; or that he was unaware of the project until recently -- Mr. Purcell's arguments are not persuasive. CCFS has done due diligence with regard to public outreach on this project, and the City of St. Paul has followed with their own extraordinarily well-attended public engagement processes (due in part to the efforts of CCFS). There is no excuse for not knowing.

When I have reflected on the efforts of Mr. Purcell, I have concluded that there is a larger issue at play here that has nothing to do with CCFS or Charles Avenue. There existed, well before CCFS came into being, a larger narrative of "business vs. city government" that seems to be rehearsed again in this situation. However this is not about the city or community failing to reach out to business. Rather, *this is about how some businesses ignore the efforts of communities and the city to reach out to them.*

The hard work, civic engagement, commitment, and tireless efforts of the Frogtown Neighborhood Association, the Hamline-Midway Coalition, the CCFS working group, and the residents we engaged in this process, should not be undone by one person who does not live in the neighborhood and does not take the time or interest to stay informed on community matters.

Even Mr. Purcell's petition, on which he claims to have 150 signatures, should not override the overwhelming majority of almost 900 residents who are supportive of the changes that are being proposed for Charles Avenue. Additionally, data from the City's own engagement processes shows *a consistent majority in favor of the project*. I expect that this will be demonstrated, again, at the City Council meeting on September 5.

The press given to Mr. Purcell's funeral home is distracting from the issue at hand: How do we redesign Charles Avenue to be a calmer, safer, and more aesthetically desirable street for residents who live in Frogtown and Hamline-Midway, **and** for people who walk, who use canes and walkers, who use wheelchairs, who ride bicycles, who use push-strollers, who are sight-and hearing-impaired, and who carry luggage, to be able to safely go through our neighborhoods?

The Snelling crossing is one of seven essential crossings in the Charles Avenue redesign project, and the elimination of any one of these would destroy the project's integrity. I make this claim based on how the Charles proposal fits in with larger transportation policy aims of the City, approved by the City Council in 2010. As you know, the Charles Avenue proposal spans from Aldine Street to Park Street, and on both the west and east ends of this project are connections to

other pedestrian-bicycling infrastructure (already present and planned). Keeping the Snelling and Charles intersection open to automotive traffic is a major disruption to the continuity and connectivity of the City's larger transportation plan.

Moreover, allowing one person to undo the work that we have done over the past two years also sends another message: Residents, *on their own initiative*, deciding to be active in community building and planning processes, and engaging in extraordinary and unprecedented public outreach, do not count as much as one business owner who is presenting a flawed argument.

Speaking on behalf of the CCFS Working Group, I urge you to send the citizens of St. Paul the message that their effort – their *service* -- matters and makes us a stronger and better City. Please approve the Charles Redesign proposal in its entirety, and in so doing affirm the extraordinary and wholly positive community building that we have done and will continue to do.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Lars D. Christiansen, Ph.D.

Hamline Midway Resident  
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