

Dear City Council Members -

Unfortunately I am out of the country on a trip that was planned six months ago and cannot be there to organize the businesses to communicate the dissatisfaction that has been expressed for the proposed plan for decorative lighting on Snelling Ave. This is not only a cost issue but in my opinion more of a safety issue for those who park on Snelling Avenue.

The council has a vote scheduled for February 18, 2015 on the decorative lighting, which will have an impact on not only my business but also on all of the businesses on north Snelling Ave. This project is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2015. Initially, it was communicated to the businesses that the improvements were going to include a new bituminous surface, new improved bus stops to accommodate the New "A" line bus route plus the city was involved in improving the handicap access ramps and some of the sidewalks need to be upgraded to ADA standards. Most recently the city decided that decorative lighting should be installed in addition to the existing lights that will remain in the median. It seems this last change to the project and who was going to bear the costs were only recently communicated to those of us property owners.

Snelling avenue is unique in that it is the busiest street in the city. Most of you already know that North Snelling currently carries 37,000 vehicles each day many of which are large trucks, buses and emergency vehicles that are 8 feet wide. The bulk of the traffic is between normal business hours of 8 am to 6 pm. Although the speed limit is only 30 mph most vehicles travel 35 – 45 mph and even 50 mph. When Snelling had its last face lift, the State essentially stated that the goal of the improvements was to move vehicles through the Midway area as efficiently as possible and the local businesses had to fight to preserve some parking areas for the businesses on Snelling. Based on the current plans it is evident that the city engineers and the council may have not learned from University light rail that parking is very important and essential to most service and retail businesses.

The current parking areas were designed to provide safety and are 10 to 11 feet wide. This may seem generous but when you have oversized vehicles (trucks and buses) traveling down the avenue at speeds often in excess of 30 mph this The oversize width is needed to allow drivers to safely exit their vehicles with the constant barrage of traffic many of which are wide trucks and buses. A person during the summer months can currently exit their vehicle between approaching vehicles and safely stand next to their car until there is a lull in the passing vehicles to walk around the car. During the winter months, the snow plowing crews push all of the snow from the wide driving surface to the side of Snelling and leave mounds of the plowed snow 2 feet or more from the curb. This in effect forces any cars parking on

Snelling further away from the curb and even closer to the oncoming traffic making it more difficult to exit a parked vehicle. This makes exiting a parked vehicle more dangerous and the mounds of snow left 2 feet from the curb make it very difficult if not impossible for passengers to open their door and exit parked vehicles. I park for short periods of time on Snelling at least 5 times a week and I can assure you it is a challenge when there isn't snow and even more so whenever we have a couple of inches of snow.

The city as I understand it has now decided to install decorative lighting in addition to the existing lighting which will remain and continue to be used. The current lighting has served well and provides adequate lighting for the sidewalks. None of the commercial businesses that I talked to were informed and none of them informed me that they had requested the additional "decorative" lighting. All of them were shocked when they learned that it was going to cost them \$154.72/per front foot on Snelling to cover the cost of the lighting and another \$4.32/foot annually to light and maintain these decorative lights. Many were in a state of disbelief. The current lighting on Snelling is certainly better than on any of the side streets that intersect Snelling. The current sidewalks adjacent to most commercial buildings are 6' wide and are thus ADA compliant. The only areas of narrow sidewalk are adjacent to the remaining residential houses on the avenue.

In areas where there is currently parking and or bus stops, there is 2 feet of boulevard between the sidewalk and the curb. In areas where there are no parking the blvd is much wider and often 12 to 13' wide. The city engineers informed me that in order to install the decorative lighting they have to remove the current curb and concrete apron extending out to the bituminous surface and expand the current 2 feet wide blvd to 4 feet wide in order to accommodate the decorative lighting. One of your engineers explained to me that the extra 2 feet of boulevard was needed so that car doors of the parked vehicles will not hit the light standards. When the engineer was asked about the safety of drivers exiting their cars after the blvd was widened by the two feet and especially during the winter when snow narrows the parking area could only state that 8 feet wide is standard on most city streets. However, Snelling is not your typical standard street and carries significant more traffic and wider vehicles at higher speeds than 95% of all other city streets. Snelling is unique and deserves special treatment. It is a state highway and a truck route and will more than likely be one as long as I am alive.

To accomplish the widening of the blvd area to 4 feet in width will require the removal and replacement of the existing curbing and concrete apron in order to set the light standards back far enough to protect car doors. Widening the blvd to protect car doors will come at a significant cost and will negatively impact the safety of those parking on Snelling Avenue. Since the width of the center median is not being changed the net result is that the width of the area where cars currently park will now be narrowed to 8 to 9 feet so that cars will be forced to park 2 feet closer to the fast moving vehicles during the summer months and 4 feet closer during the winter months when snow is sitting 2 feet or more out from the curb. Thus,

vehicles parking during the winter will have only 6 to 7 feet wide parking area which essentially makes parking in the narrower area on Snelling unsafe and unusable during half the year.

When the engineer was asked about the safety of drivers exiting their cars especially during the winter the pat answer given was that 8 feet is standard and more than sufficient. However, when the engineer was asked about what happens during the winter months when the first 2 feet of the area is covered with snow he had no answer. When the engineer was asked if he had gone out onto Snelling and parked his vehicle 4 feet from the current curb and then attempt to exit his vehicle during rush hour or normal hours of a business day the answer was a definite no. It seems that the design was made without experiencing the circumstances of the street and without any input from those of us taxpayers who either regularly park or who have customers who daily use and park on the street for many years.

The proposed design compromises the safety of drivers in exchange for protection of car doors during six months of the year. The reason it will only protect during six months is that a passenger during the winter months cannot swing a car door open because of the mounds of snow next to the curb unless the driver parks an unsafe distance from the mounded snow. As previously noted, the proposed design will be more expensive since it requires the removal and replacement of the existing concrete curbing and apron out to the bituminous surface. Again, the additional the extra width of the blvd is only needed to protect car doors. I am willing to bet that anyone who parks on Snelling would choose a wider parking area instead of a larger set back from decorative lighting to protect a car door. A driver can typically adjust the placement of the vehicle to avoid the light standards or other obstructions which you find on most city streets. Plus, the cost of leaving the curb and the concrete apron in its current location will save substantial dollars for this project.

The decorative lighting will not replace the existing lighting but be in addition to the current lighting. The installation of the new lighting will not be conserving any energy but increasing the City's carbon footprint. Not one business and property owner I talked to stated that they had requested the upgraded decorative lighting. Who will pay for the costs of this upgraded lighting? It will definitely not be those who drive through the community or those pedestrians who walk up and down the sidewalks. The current proposal is for the council to assess all of the adjacent owners for the entire cost of the project and to assess each front foot annually to maintain and light these decorative lights. How will the decorative lighting improve the customer base of those of us who are only open during the normal 8 to 5 Monday to Friday?

For those of you who may not be familiar with the north Snelling area, we are already struggling with many vacant buildings and a lot of struggling businesses some of which are still trying to recover from the Light rail construction that ended last year. Many businesses and property owners are run by immigrants who were totally unaware of the expense that is going to fall on their businesses and most do not understand the impact on the parking. When I stopped at several of them on the few spare moments I had available before we left town, I explained the project and its costs to several of these immigrant business owners who literally had no idea as to what was all involved with the project to install decorative lighting or the fact that they were going to be asked to pay the entire cost of the unwanted decorative lighting.

The cost will be a burden on all of us small businesses and will force those who are barely hanging on to close their businesses which will only further depress the business climate on Snelling. However, it appears that council member Stark has stated that he believes that the “decorative” lighting to be paid for by the businesses will be the catalyst to improve the economic conditions of the area. I disagree and believe the disruption by the construction and the cost of the project will have a negative effect and drive out those marginal businesses who are just barely making it. How installing decorative lighting and adding a substantial additional financial burden on already struggling businesses will help spur an economic development escapes me. I believe most business owners would rather decide how to best deploy the money needed to pay for this project in their own business.

If the city wants decorative lighting, it should install the decorative lighting in the existing boulevard without incurring the cost of removing and replacing the concrete curbing and apron so that a safe and functional parking area is preserved and the cost minimized. The city should also figure out a way to pay for it without further burdening the businesses and property owners who have not requested the decorative lighting and see no economic advantage to their businesses or an increase in the market value of their properties. I strongly disagree with council member Stark that this decorative lighting is needed for safer walking areas for the pedestrians but if it is needed then the community as a whole should assume the cost and not just those businesses who front on the avenue. I know my business that occupies space on Snelling will not see an increase in its business as a result of the decorative lighting nor will the value of the building owned by my wife be increased one dollar. Furthermore, our tenants will not see any economic value in this project and will move if asked to share in the cost.

The Safety of all who use Snelling should be the first and foremost consideration in design of the avenue. The installation of the decorative lighting as currently planned will jeopardize the safety of those who park on Snelling in order to protect damage to car doors. It's time for the City Council to listen and respect the wishes of the business community and to ask for input rather than forcing an unwanted project and the related costs on struggling business owners. No matter what you do, Snelling Avenue will never be a Grand Avenue or Ford

Parkway. Hopefully, some common sense will prevail at the meeting and the decorative lighting will be scraped or revised to reduce the cost and to preserve safe parking areas for the businesses.

Thank you for your considerations. In the future, the city needs to improve its communication to businesses and to get the business owners and property owners involved in future projects. I can assure you that if decorative lighting and the planned costs had been communicated to me you would have heard from me a lot sooner. However, when nothing is communicated there is no way for us to know what plans are being created that negatively impact our businesses both in functionality and in costs that will be expected to be absorbed by the business community.

Very truly yours,

Steve & Kathy Nelson

Siems Ct.

Arden Hills, MN 5112

Property: 665 No. Snelling Ave.