

My Villager, Letters to the Editor, August 14, 2025

Where have all the taxes gone?

If you are like me, your mortgage payments just went up to add to the escrow to cover the huge property tax increase for 2025. Mine went up 20%. If the past is any indication, we're probably looking at another increase for 2026. How do city decision-makers think we can sustain these increases?

One wonders how all of these tax dollars are spent. An area of concern is the excessive funds being spent on separated bike trails, often with no review to determine best fit for the context and very little visibility by the public.

The Minnesota State Demographic Center, in its July 16 report to the City Council, estimated that 0.6% of Saint Paul's population bicycled to work in 2023. Based on current census numbers, that calculates to 1,845 people. If we round up to 1% to account for recreational cyclists, the number of regular cyclists in Saint Paul is 3,075. The Saint Paul Bicycle Plan, approved in 2024, calls for 139 miles of new, separated bike trails by 2040. Did they even stop to consider the costs? If we use the cost estimate from the recent Summit Avenue Regional Trail plan (\$2.52 million per mile), the total (under)estimated cost for these 139 miles of trail will be \$350.3 million. The whole 2025 budget for the city of Saint Paul is \$854.9 million. You tell me, does it make sense to spend 41% of the annual budget for our city to provide facilities for 1% of our citizens? Where is the equity in that decision?

We have many other pressing needs all across our city that require funding, including road repair and park maintenance. But city leaders seem determined to fund these new trails. The value of Saint Paul's commercial property, especially in downtown, is decreasing. This puts added burdens on residential property owners to fund the cost of city services by repeatedly increasing our property taxes.

Ask our city leaders to rein in this excessive spending and focus on responsible stewardship of our tax dollars. As Pete Seeger's song laments, "Oh, when will you ever learn?"

– **Gary R. Todd, Summit Hill**

Let's rethink Summit bike trail

A new question has arisen from a community meeting held July 10 by Save Our Street about the city of Saint Paul's Summit Avenue bike trail project set to start in 2026 (*MyVillager*, July 25). Why?

The design of Summit's existing bike lane is prudent and meets the needs of cyclists who use Summit Avenue for all reasons (commuting, recreation and pleasure). While the street is in need of resurfacing, the current bike lane is a safe and reliable facility for all bicyclists. So why are we accepting the burden of higher taxes for a total

reconstruction of Summit from the Mississippi River to the Cathedral. It will cost millions to uproot trees, relocate curbs and sewer drains, and redesign the essence of our historic Summit Avenue.

The 1% increase in the city's sales tax was sold to us as a way to repair our streets, but those in charge of the money included street reconstruction. Why?

Saint Paul is facing many major issues regarding property taxes, sales taxes, and the declining commercial tax base. The city has almost 20% tax-free government property. We have many institutions of higher education where staff and students come in from outside the city, use our streets and services, yet no tax burden is placed on their premises. Now we want to use tax money to construct an elevated bike trail on Summit that only burdens residents with the destruction of the historic intent of Summit Avenue and delays the work on so many other needed streets, paths and lanes in Saint Paul. Why?

Special interest groups who have a myopic view of this proposed transportation facility for Summit have not considered the burden it places on Americans with Disability Act issues, resident concerns or city tax concerns at a time when state and federal support is in question.

It is time for residents to contact their representatives, from the mayor's office to the district council, and ask for a delay in proceeding on this project. The time is now, the damage is irreversible, and the future is in jeopardy.

We have adequate bike paths throughout Saint Paul. It is a safe and enjoyable experience to ride on the roads, paths, trails and lanes that are in place.

– ***Cynthia McArthur, Macalester-Groveland***

A puzzling plan for Summit trail

Discussion of the proposed rebuilding of Summit Avenue's bikeways seems to center on the question of tree loss. City foresters predict the loss of 221 trees, while the SOS arborist warns that 950 trees will be destroyed. Furthermore, I heard that tree loss will occur regardless of where the bikeway is located, because of root disruption from maintenance work and the replacement of aging utilities from the street to homes. It's hard to formulate an opinion on a puzzle with so many variables.

I'm a biker and I ride regularly along Summit. Riding next to vehicular traffic does not seem to bother me or the bikers I encounter. With the driving lane adjacent to the bike lane, faster bikers can pass slower riders by moving temporarily into the driving lane. If the bike lane is moved away from the vehicle lane, it will need to be wider than currently proposed.

Furthermore, the many cross streets will change the relationship between drivers and bikers. Currently, vehicles entering Summit stop without blocking the bike lane; moving the bike lane onto the boulevard will likely cause some cars to block the bike lane while waiting for a break in vehicular traffic.

We're left with questions. Who can tell us how many trees will be sacrificed to the utility work? Who can tell us how that number will increase if the bike lanes are relocated? Who can tell us the effect on property values or the cost of assessments?

– ***Dutton Foster, Macalester-Groveland***