

**BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP**  
**Response to the City of Northfield**  
**on annexing by petition the Gill and Prawer properties**

Bridgewater Township respectfully declines the annexation requested by the city of Northfield as premature. We are well aware this area is identified in Northfield's comprehensive plan for future urban growth within the next thirty years. We encourage the city of Northfield to partner with the township in exploring and taking actions that will allow thoughtful future economic development, including rapid annexations which enable the City to plan and to take advantage of opportunities such as the Mayo radiology clinic.

**Annexation:**

Our determination that the annexation request by the city is premature is based on the following:

1. In Section V of the current agreement: "The city of Northfield agrees that during the term of this Agreement **no annexations**, other than through this Orderly Annexation Agreement, **shall be requested** or take place from the Township of Bridgewater to the City of Northfield, except in such cases where the annexation is ordered by the State of Minnesota without petition by the City." The annexation request presented by the City is outside the scope of the current agreement, as everyone recognizes. From the Township's point of view, changing the agreement to accommodate land owner petitions as they come forth means, in effect, there are no limits enforcing orderly annexation. The City's request to alter the agreement does not seem to be the result of any change in Northfield's development strategy since the agreement was signed, nor is there an immediate development opportunity to which we are responding.
2. The annexation request seems inconsistent with the master plan being created for developing this area on several fronts. First, the annexation request does not deal with City control of the portions of Decker and 100<sup>th</sup> Street which will have to be paved in order to develop this property. The original cost estimates by H&K for public infrastructure in this area did not include paving these streets. This seems inconsistent with the objective of developing the site. Second, the opportunity to develop the area appears to be extremely limited given the intent of one of the landowners, stated in the Northfield Planning Commission Public Hearing on the annexation request, to continue farming as long as health permits and not develop the land. Consequently there seems to be a great deal of uncertainty in both the intent and the opportunity to develop the property.

3. The annexation request is made in the absence of land use ordinances which would govern this area. We prefer to see such ordinances in place to insure that the annexation would be consistent with Minnesota State guidelines for land management. The MN legislature 414.01.1a finds that: “sound urban development and **preservation of agricultural land and open spaces through land use planning is essential to the continued economic growth of this state.**” The annexation area under consideration contains prime agricultural land, it contains shoreland for two creeks in the Cannon River watershed and it is identified by Northfield as critical to open spaces for a natural scenic and recreational corridor.
4. The enabling language of MN statute 414.01(2) (on annexation) states “municipal government most efficiently provides governmental services in areas intensively developed for residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental purposes; and township government most efficiently provides governmental services in areas used or developed for agricultural, open space, and rural residential purposes.”

It is highly likely that even if annexed the land will remain agricultural for several decades given the business challenges faced by development companies, the financial challenges confronting the City and a landowner’s desire to keep a large portion of the area agricultural for at least the near future. Until there is a genuine opportunity for development this particular land is more appropriately governed by the township.

With this in mind, the township views this request for annexation by the city of Northfield as premature. Frankly, we don’t understand why the city perceives this as an opportunity when the landowner closest to municipal sewer and water is currently unwilling to sell or develop the land. Nor, given its debt service coverage ratio, does the City seem to have the capacity to be a financial partner in developing the area which is a practical requirement for a successful development in this economy.

**We do not see this decision on the part of the Township as limiting development opportunities for the City.** If the City had a project right now along Armstrong Road that required 60 acres within the designated annexation area and the landowner was willing to sell, the annexation would follow exactly the same process as for the Mayo Clinic land and could be completed in less than a month. We also note that Northfield’s Comprehensive Plan strongly encourages infill as the preferred development program. The City currently has about 250 vacant acres within the core of the city and another 530 agricultural acres recently annexed. How is annexing another 456 acres is even remotely consistent with this guidance given by the Comprehensive Plan?

## **Partnering:**

We recognize that sometime this land will very likely become part of the City. That, after all, was one of the motivations for creating the current annexation agreement.

In order to prepare for that development, we encourage the city of Northfield to partner with Bridgewater Township:

- To conserve, protect, and improve Rice (Spring Brook) Creek, as
  - We understand the city may pass a Rice Creek policy in September, and may pass land use ordinance by December, though we are unclear as to whether this land use ordinance includes DNR approved shore land rules.
  - We encourage the city to jointly explore a permanent conservation easement on Rice Creek in conjunction with creating a land use policy for this area that respects its rural neighbors and protects Rice Creek and Heath Creek watersheds.
  - The Township expects to pass a Stream Protection Ordinance within the next several months
  - The Township has initiated a stream monitoring program and has conducted an assessment of the condition of all the streams in the township.
- To implement the Northfield greenway plan since:
  - The state recognizes that townships are best suited to preserve open space. We request the city consider how it might partner with the township do take advantage of this inherent strength.
  - The Northfield greenway plan was adopted by Bridgewater Township in its comprehensive plan. This is the first area under consideration for annexation since that action.
  - There has been no response to the township's request for information last November as to how the green corridor will be implemented in this area, particularly in light of the current economic problems
- To upgrade Decker Avenue and 100<sup>th</sup> Street to support urban usage and traffic volumes, recognizing
  - Decker Avenue traffic volume (500 vehicles per day) is already well beyond normal township road usage (about 50 cars per day)
  - Various state and county sources cite 250-500 vehicles per day as the point a road should be paved.
  - Township Road Policy stresses urban development should pay for its share of the change in traffic on roads affected by development. The cost of increasing traffic volume and weight should not be borne by township residents while the benefits are realized by city residents.
  - The possibility of creating a joint powers agreement by Northfield, Dundas, Rice County and Bridgewater Township to upgrade and maintain Decker Avenue.

**Next Steps:**

The Annexation Agreement was written 10 years ago. The world has changed. It may be that as we jointly work on these issues related to urbanization we may find ways that our annexation agreement may be modified to the benefit of both the City and the Township. After the City and the Township make progress on several of these partnering projects, or others that might be suggested by Northfield, the Township will certainly be open to discussing changes to the Agreement that would benefit both parties.