

To: The Northfield Arts and Culture Commission

From: Douglas Green *Douglas E. Gr* _____

Re: Temporary Public Art Policy

As a Northfield writer, who has lived in town for over thirty-three years, and a Professor *emeritus* of English at Augsburg University, I was very disappointed and frankly disturbed to hear that the Chair of the Arts and Culture Commission said the following at the Commission's meeting on Monday, 13 Sept, which I was unable to attend:

We don't want 'thought-provoking' art, or art that creates dialogue. Those are not the priorities of the city and we are here to serve the city. We want art that attracts people to Northfield.

I can't be sure this is an exact quotation, but even the gist of it is highly problematic.

Here's why:

- In the ordinance that established it, the ACC has among its primary purposes:
 - To "include new ethnic groups in Northfield's identity and sense of community" and
 - To "foster inclusive and cross-cultural activities to help build community as Northfield continues to become more diverse."
- In the city's resolution on Arts in Public Places, they list as one key criterion the following question: "Does the project encourage civic dialogue about art and civic issues?"

I can't imagine that the Chair means to thwart either two of the organization's key purposes or a city resolution. At least I hope not.

But beyond that I find a rather stark and paradoxical misunderstanding of the very nature of what about the arts attracts both visitors and new residents, including an increasing number of retirees, to Northfield. People who love the arts love the very qualities that the chair derides as incidental to them when in fact these attributes are essential: Thinking people like art not just because it is or may be beautiful, but precisely because it does provoke thought. And people who choose to visit or to live in a place they presume to be an arts hub do so because they like the challenges of art—even if they don't always like the art itself.

I urge the Arts and Culture Commission to reaffirm their adherence to the principles of their founding and to the city resolution on public art, which specifically endorses projects that "encourage civic dialogue about art and civic issues"—in other words, that are in their very essence "thought-provoking." To that end, I strongly recommend the Commission approve the proposed Temporary Public Arts Policy.