

## Northfield Poet Laureate Report September 2021

### Events

- I introduced the winners of the Spanish Sidewalk Poetry contest at the capstone event at the Hispanic Heritage Celebration in Central Park on Saturday, September 18. Francisco Gaytan read his poem, Alondra Pérez read Tyler Gardner's poem, and Mar Valdecantos read Luis Rivera's poem. Angelica Linder provided Spanish interpretation.
- Danny Solis gave a poetry reading in the library atrium on Thursday, September 30 as part of Hispanic Heritage Month. Angelica Linder and I co-hosted. Danny was paid an honorarium from funds budgeted for the Poet Laureate program. About 16 people attended.

### Kudos

- Becky Boling, Rob Hardy, and Steve McCown had poems published in the Fall 2021 issue of *Willows Wept Review*. [https://www.magcloud.com/webviewer/2071575?\\_r=150177&s=w](https://www.magcloud.com/webviewer/2071575?_r=150177&s=w)
- Leslie Schultz's poem "Dandelion" was featured on the website of the literary magazine *Third Wednesday*. <https://thirdwednesdaymagazine.org/2021/09/19/dandelions-leslie-schultz/>
- Becky Boling's poem "Here" appeared in *Visual Verse*. <https://visualverse.org/submissions/here/>
- D.E. Green's poem "Abstraction: After Stein" appeared in *Visual Verse*. <https://visualverse.org/submissions/abstraction-after-stein/>
- Diane LeBlanc's essay "Mountain Quartet" appeared in *Atticus Review*. <https://atticusreview.org/mountain-quartet/>

### Public Art

"It's glorious!" —commenter on Facebook, about the Riverwalk steps poem.

- Natalie and Teresa finished painting the collaborative poem on the Riverwalk steps, and the seventeen poets involved have been submitting photographs of themselves on their step to be compiled into a photomosaic. There have been discussions of posting a temporary sign near the steps with the text of the poem in both Spanish and English.

Despite the withdrawal of Say Their Names—Northfield's request to the ACC, I believe the commission needs to decide how it will deal with such requests in the future. It was my impression that the ACC was making this unnecessarily complicated and time-consuming by delaying action and attempting to introduce a new policy to cover these requests. The City already has a policy on Art in Public Places, passed by the City Council in 2017, the purpose of which is "to guide public and private development and the installation of public art within the City of Northfield." Among the policy's objectives are:

- “Enhanc[ing] the aesthetic environment of public places, such as buildings, roads, paths **sidewalks**, and landscapes, through high-quality public art, including permanent and **temporary** art installations (emphasis added).”
- “Involving a broad range of groups, neighbors, and organizations in the planning or creation of public artworks.”
- “Involv[ing] artists in the creation and development of art by encouraging a variety of creative opportunities for artists with a range of experiences.”

All of these objectives are met by the Say Their Names—Northfield project. The policy authorizes creation of a Public Art Review Committee to review proposals for the installation of public art. All that needed to be done in the case of Say Their Names was to follow this policy, to convene and PARC, and consider the request.

I would also like to suggest that the ACC recommend that the City Council revise the ordinance that prohibits marking on City property, to permit the use of temporary media such as sidewalk chalk. In Spokane, Washington, the City Council amended the city’s anti-graffiti ordinance, which had been similar to Northfield’s, to allow “expressive conduct on the public right of way using non-permanent, non-toxic means, such as chalk or water-soluble paints, in a manner which does not obstruct or interfere with the public right of way.” (The entire ordinance can be found here: <https://my.spokanecity.org/smc/?Section=10.10.070>). This could be used as a possible model for an amendment to Northfield’s unnecessarily restrictive ordinance.

Removing the (selectively-enforced) prohibition on chalking would open more opportunities for artmaking in Northfield. Numerous cities, including several in Minnesota, host sidewalk chalk (or street art) festivals, which draw both artists and tourists and enhance the reputation of the city.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, the city of St. Paul organized a sidewalk chalk version of its sidewalk poetry project, encouraging residents to compose their own poems and chalk them on the sidewalks of the city. As Public Art Saint Paul said in a press release: “This project encourages participants to re-imagine the sidewalk as a space to share their voices” [\[reference\]](#). This is what public spaces should be for: the sharing of the diverse voices that make up our democracy. But such a project would not be permitted under Northfield’s current ordinance.

---

<sup>1</sup> Examples of chalk art festivals in Minnesota:  
 Chalk the Walk (Centennial Lakes Park, Edina, MN)  
<https://www.bettertogetheredina.org/chalkthewalk2021>  
 Chalkfest Arbor Lakes (Maple Grove, MN)  
<http://www.chalkfestarborlakes.com>  
 Downtown Minneapolis Street Art Festival (Minneapolis, MN)  
<https://www.mplsstreetartfest.com>  
 Two Harbors Chalk.a.Lot (Two Harbors, MN)  
<https://twoharborsarts.com/chalk-a-lot>  
 City-Wide Chalk the Walk Festival (Rochester, MN)  
<http://www.rneighbors.org/chalk-the-walk-festival/>

In 2015, the ACC sponsored, and Council Member Nakasian facilitated, a discussion on Peter Kageyama's book *For the Love of Cities*. In that book, Kageyama discusses, among other things, the ways in which cities can move from being "squelchers" to being "supporters" of creativity. Kageyama writes that "in order to facilitate the creative endeavors that its citizens have been inspired to bring to life, cities may need to lighten up a bit" (124). He goes on to say that the squelching of "street-level creativity in the city" is often caused by "a stupid interpretation of the rules" (126). Northfield should not be known as a place that squelches creativity and free expression among its residents. It should be the purpose of the ACC to facilitate and encourage creativity, as it is directed to do by City policy, and not insist on "a stupid interpretation of the rules."

Submitted by:  
Rob Hardy