



## Winnetka/Northfield

# State senator accuses Northfield of withholding information

By [John P. Huston](#) Tribune reporter Sep. 30 at 2:30 p.m.

State Sen. Jeff Schoenberg is accusing Northfield village officials of deliberately failing to produce documents in response to his Freedom of Information Act request over expenses related to the debate over widening Willow Road.

Schoenberg filed the FOIA request with the village Sept. 8, when he accused the village of creating a “slush fund” to fight the road project, which some fear will make their community a major thoroughfare.

Northfield denied the accusation, and on Sept. 20 it provided a three-page, 15-year financial breakdown of money spent related to the project. Schoenberg said he will appeal to Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan’s office, because he did not receive proper documentation to support the data.

“I found the information provided in your letter woefully incomplete, and I believe that the Village of Northfield is in violation of the state’s Freedom of Information Act by deliberately failing to provide public contracts, billing records, board minutes and other supporting documentation,” Schoenberg wrote in a letter to Northfield Village Manager Stacy Sigman.

He also widened his original request to “all contracts, memoranda, communications, board minutes, invoices, billing records and other such relevant documents.”

Earlier this month, Schoenberg said the village was spending money on, “politically-connected attorneys, lobbyists and public relations firms” to fight a plan to widen the two-lane, 1.2-mile patch of Willow that runs through Northfield.

According to its data, Northfield has spent \$686,709 of its own money, plus \$762,394 which was reimbursed by the Illinois Department of Transportation, since the issue first surfaced in 1995.

The bulk of local funds — \$480,000 – were used to support a previous IDOT plan from 2005 that would only have expanded Willow from two to three lanes across, officials said. After that plan was scuttled, Northfield has spent \$208,206 to fight a movement to widen Willow Road to four or five lanes.

Northfield supports a three-lane Willow Road, citing safety concerns. Schoenberg and neighboring towns support a four- or five-lane road to alleviate traffic problems.

As part of its response to Schoenberg’s FOIA request, Northfield Village President Fred Gougler said Schoenberg’s claims were, “inaccurate and defamatory.”

He criticized the Evanston state senator for “malicious and offensive language,” and “politicizing” a safety issue.