

## Northfield: Schoenberg: Willow Road info lacking

October 5, 2010

By **CHRISTOPHER PETERSON** [cpeterson@pioneerlocal.com](mailto:cpeterson@pioneerlocal.com)

State Senator Jeff Schoenberg is not satisfied with Northfield's response to a Freedom of Information Act request regarding money spent to prevent the widening of Willow Road.

Last month, Schoenberg asked Northfield for a detailed account of money the village has spent in the last 15 years to fight the expansion of Willow Road.

After Northfield responded Sept. 20 with records showing more than \$686,000 spent on Willow-related efforts, Schoenberg called the response "woefully incomplete" and has vowed to enlist the help of Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan.

In Northfield's initial response to the FOIA request, Village Manager Stacy Sigman noted that Schoenberg only asked for money spent specifically to keep the road as two lanes. The village said it had spent no money for that purpose.

However, the village outlined many expenses --both paid for by Northfield and shared with the state and other municipalities -- intended to study alternate configurations or to implement a three-lane plan.

In a Sept. 29 letter addressed to Sigman, Schoenberg re-submitted his request -- this time in much greater detail.

### **Village President Fred Gougler declined to comment.**

In addition to the renewed FOIA request, Schoenberg accused the village of "questionable practices" related to Willow Road. Specifically, he questioned money that had been reimbursed by the Northfield Park District and Sunset Ridge District 29 and called their involvement "highly unusual."

Both governing bodies have been involved in deliberations, including a joint effort to brainstorm solutions. That group, the Willow Road Enhancement Steering Committee, also involved officials from Winnetka.

Schoenberg asked for contract information regarding Northfield and the general counsel firm Klein, Thorpe & Jenkins. Northfield currently pays the firm a flat fee for legal counsel, and officials said they could not specify how much of that total amount would have been used during the Willow Road debate.

Schoenberg said that answer wasn't good enough.

"The people of Northfield have a right to know how much their Village government is spending on lawyer retainer fees and what percentage of that retainer is spent on Willow Road," he wrote.

In latest FOIA request, Schoenberg has asked for contracts, meeting minutes, memos, correspondence, invoices, billing records and other documents. In the request, he also wanted to know how much has been spent to promote the three-lane configuration.

The longstanding debate has pitted Northfield and state officials against each other. Northfield has long said that the road should be widened to no more than three lanes, while Schoenberg and officials from other towns have argued for four or more lanes.