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My husband Mitch and I are the couple featured in the Post-Crescent's February 2nd front page article about special assessments.

We've had to take on a central role in this citizen's movement that we never anticipated, and the positive response has overwhelmed us. Strangers thank us for bringing this subject out into the open for public discussion, and all agree that this policy should have ended years,--decades-- ago. So many people who've had to pay an assessment, or help a family member pay it, have told us that they want this to end. We can't let this go. Not when we see what it has done to ordinary people who are struggling to make ends meet every month, and now have to come up with money they don't have to pay for something they don't own. People who faithfully pay their property taxes every year and thought they were doing their fair share to keep this city running, and now have to scramble to save their house from having a tax lien placed against it.

Streets, sidewalks, lighting, curbs and gutters, water and sewer systems, and storm drains are part of the infrastructure of a city and benefit every resident of that city. They are no different than the schools, police and fire protection, parks, libraries and other publicly provided assets that we all use and fund as a community. We don't expect that any of these other civic services should be paid for, even in part, by the people who happen to live next to them at the time they are built. All of us paying a little more each year would ensure that none of us would ever again be subject to a ruinous one-time tax bill we didn't expect and can't afford. It's long past time that the general tax levy includes these infrastructure costs. The true and transparent cost of living in a city like Appleton needs to be acknowledged and shared by all of its residents every year. I wish we all had to see it. I wish everyone who has paid an assessment in the last few years would put a sign in front of their home or business displaying the dollar amount they had to pay. I think we would be shocked at how much these assessments have cost people.

The city's five year plan shows that the next section of Appleton up for reconstruction, and special assessments, is the central city area. This area comprises some of the oldest housing stock in Appleton, and the property owners in these neighborhoods will be even less able to pay these assessments

than those of us on John St. and Telulah Ave.,--and it's going to be difficult enough for us. I urge all of you to take a tour of that area and imagine what's going to happen when every homeowner on each of those streets, block after block, is faced with a multi-thousand dollar bill for infrastructure replacement. We have to face the grim fact that it's going to be an economic disaster. It would be much easier and more effective to prevent it from happening, than to deal with the consequences of keeping the current policy in place.

The members of this committee, and the entire Common Council, are going to have to summon the courage and resolve necessary to end special assessments. Stop the practice now, and let the passage of time start healing the anger, bitterness and resentment that these assessments have generated. We know it won't be easy and that there will be some opposition. We expect Appleton to lead from the front and set a progressive policy in place that no longer financially devastates individual property owners. It will be a selling point when trying to attract new residents and businesses,--they can know that their carefully set financial plans won't suddenly be disrupted by a large and unexpected assessment bill that they may not be able to pay. People will be able to make real estate decisions without having to consider how much every foot of street frontage might eventually cost them, or that the otherwise perfect house on a corner lot might wipe out their savings with a double assessment.

End special assessments. All of the infrastructure in this city belongs to all of us, and we should all be responsible for providing and maintaining it.

Thank you for bringing this matter forward for consideration.