

[This is a copy of a letter from Talia Halliday posted on Facebook on June 11, 2026.]

Dear Mayor Thomson and Members of the City Council,

I am writing as the Kirkwood Activation Consultant to express my serious concerns regarding the proposal to create a car-free Kirkwood for an extended period each year.

My opposition is not philosophical. It is practical. Since October 2025, I have been responsible for creating programming and events that bring people downtown, specifically to Kirkwood. For 16 years I've been an event organizer outside of this position. I have firsthand knowledge of the labor, infrastructure, staffing, partnerships, and financial resources required to make public spaces feel vibrant, welcoming, and active.

The reality is that simply closing a street does not create activity.

Activity must be intentionally planned, funded, staffed, marketed, executed, and maintained.

As an example, I recently hosted a single three-hour event that activated just one block of Kirkwood. The total cost approached \$7,000. Even at that scale, the event relied heavily on volunteers, community goodwill, and assistance from friends. The physical labor, planning, logistics, vendor coordination, setup, teardown, marketing, and operational management were substantial.

Now imagine attempting to activate five city blocks for months.

The staffing alone would require an entire team dedicated to programming, operations, marketing, maintenance, logistics, and community outreach. The infrastructure costs would be significant. If the vision is truly to transform Kirkwood into a public gathering space comparable to a city park, then we would need permanent shade structures, seating, tables, landscaping, storage solutions, event infrastructure, rental partnerships, maintenance plans, and ongoing programming budgets.

The financial commitment would be enormous. At a time when the city faces other pressing priorities, I question whether this is the best use of public resources. Those funds could be directed toward challenges that are more urgent and more impactful to residents' quality of life (ie, our mental health and homeless crisis currently presenting itself in our streets).

One of those challenges is the condition of downtown itself.

I want downtown Bloomington to be family-friendly. I spend much of my professional life trying to make that happen. However, we must be honest about the current experience many families encounter downtown.

While our police department and Downtown Ambassadors do important work, we continue to face significant issues involving mental illness, addiction, and public disturbances. Families regularly encounter individuals in crisis, public profanity, erratic behavior, and situations that make some visitors uncomfortable. These challenges are complex and deserve compassion, but they are real.

Before we invest millions into creating a permanent pedestrian destination, we should first address the conditions that currently discourage many families from spending time downtown.

In my view, Kirkwood does not need to be fixed (it's not broken).

What Kirkwood needs is strategic improvement.

We need more shade.

We need better infrastructure.

We need improved bollard systems that allow easier access for vendors, food trucks, and event operators.

We need stronger partnerships for tables, chairs, tents, and public amenities.

We need continued investment in public safety and social services.

Most importantly, we need the flexibility to host special events when appropriate.

Temporary street closures for festivals, markets, family events, and community gatherings make sense. They allow us to create excitement and concentrate resources where they will have the greatest impact.

A many month closure is an entirely different proposition.

Without constant activation, Kirkwood risks becoming a largely empty corridor rather than a vibrant destination. Based on my experience organizing events, I do not believe the city currently possesses the staffing, infrastructure, budget, or operational capacity necessary to sustain activation at the level residents (or Council) envision.

I am also concerned by suggestions that the small business community is broadly united in support of this proposal. That is simply not the reality I have observed.

Opinions among business owners remain deeply divided. Support is far from unanimous.

Even organizations frequently cited as advocates for closure no longer appear to speak with a single voice on the issue. Furthermore, organizations such as the Kirkwood Community Association represent only a small number of businesses directly located on Kirkwood. Their perspectives are valuable, but they should not be presented as representing the consensus of the broader downtown business community.

I urge the City Council and Mayor Thomson to continue supporting temporary and strategic street closures for special events while rejecting the proposal for an extended seasonal closure.

Kirkwood is one of Bloomington's greatest assets. It is active, vibrant, and economically important. It does not require a dramatic transformation. It requires thoughtful investment, practical improvements, and continued support for the businesses, organizations, and community members who already make it successful.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Talia Halliday
Small Business Owner
Downtown Activation Consultant
Mother of Five and Community Member

As an addendum -- I would have been present at City Council Chambers at last evenings' meeting myself, but alas, I was hosting an event downtown:)