

'Where the biggies leave off...'

# Hill & Lake Press

Published for East Isles, Lowry Hill, Kenwood Isles, & Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhoods

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 4

www.hillandlakepress.com

APRIL 26, 2019

## Earthmovers poised to start deforestation of Kenilworth Corridor

By Michael Wilson

There's a sense of sadness hanging over the Kenilworth Corridor on these warm, sunny days, and on the cool, misty days as well. Buds are just beginning to show on tree branches and even the unpracticed eye and ear can tell that our urban forest and parkland is once again coming back to life. But it won't be for long.

For people who know that within three weeks the earthmovers will roar into action and scrape broad swaths of the Kenilworth clean, the pleasure of visiting the corridor is bittersweet. We add what we're seeing and experiencing this month to the thousands of mental images and memories we already have of this priceless gem of nature near the heart of our major urban area.

There's a lot of anger too. Why do something as destructive and irreversible as deforestation when Southwest LRT still faces hurdles?

Despite what the Met Council, the Hennepin County board, and their PR consultants would have us believe, Southwest LRT is *not* a done deal. Full federal funding is still several hurdles away, and the Hennepin County board, which is bearing over half the project's cost, reportedly is worried that the project will soon need another nine-figure infusion of our tax dollars.

Project engineers continue to assure us soothingly that they can dig a 60-foot-deep trench 24 inches from the footings of 90-year-old concrete grain silos, right next to freight trains weighing 14,584 tons when fully loaded, all within an impossibly narrow 59-foot-wide right-of-way without causing any damage to the buildings on either side. They are so confident of 100% success, in fact, that they told the crowd at the March 20 KNO/CIDNA community meeting that "we don't have a Plan B." Hubris, anyone?

And the lawsuit by the Lakes and Parks Alliance of Minneapolis awaits a decision from the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals that, if successful, could send the selection of a route through Minneapolis back to the drawing board.

### Requests for moratorium rejected.

Last week two letters went out to Gov. Tim Walz and Met Council Chair Nora Slawik asking for a moratorium on the deforestation until all the project's hurdles have been overcome. One letter went from the Kenwood and Cedar-Isles-Dean neighborhood associations, the Lakes and Parks Alliance, LRT Done Right, and the Kenilworth Preservation Group. The other letter went from our six local and state elected representatives (but not County Commissioner Marion Greene). The full letters appear on an inside page of this issue of Hill & Lake Press.

The response was as expected: "No dice." Walz,

(To **Kenilworth Deforestation**, p. 3)



Neighborhood associations, advocacy groups, elected officials, and individuals wrote the governor and Met Council chair in mid-April seeking a moratorium on the destructive and irreversible clear-cutting of the Kenilworth Corridor until SWLRT has cleared all its remaining hurdles. The answer was no, because that might jeopardize the project. By mid-May, barring intervention, earthmovers will have scraped broad swaths of the corridor clean. (Photo illustration: Michael Wilson.)

## Met Council orders secret destruction of endangered bee habitat in Kenilworth

By Jeanette Colby

An alarm sounded in 2015: the rusty patched bumble bee, an important pollinator, had declined in population by 87 percent over the last 20 years, due in large part to habitat loss.

Fortunately, our neighborhood provided habitat to this incredibly valuable creature — in the "prairie" bordering the Kenilworth Trail. Unfortunately, this floral habitat is now in the way of the SWLRT.

The rusty patched bumble bee is "balancing precariously on the brink of extinction and has become the first-ever bumble bee in the United States to be listed as endangered [as of March, 2017]," according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

But without any public notice, the Met Council this spring mowed down the "prairie" habitat area near the proposed 21st Street station. The Met Council justified the destruction in an internal memo found deep within a 2018 Supplemental Environmental Assessment. It explained that the habitat "may be impacted during construction during the bees' active season (April to October); therefore, to minimize and reduce the potential for conflict to active bees, floral areas will be mowed before local food sources (i.e.,



This rusty-patched bumble bee queen, or gyne, will hibernate all winter and lay her fertilized eggs in the spring to start a new colony. But not in the Kenilworth Corridor, because the Metropolitan Council has destroyed them and their critical habitat.

nectar producing vegetation) become available."

In other words, we have to destroy the village to save it. When the landscaping is restored after three years of construction, will there be any rusty patched bumble bees left to repopulate it?

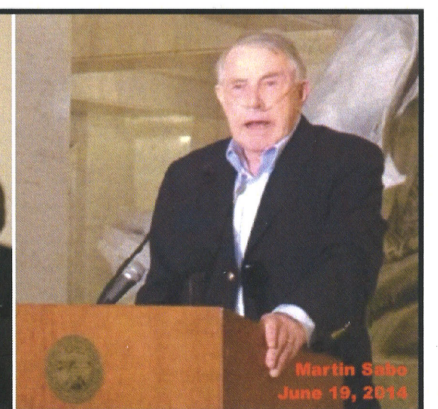
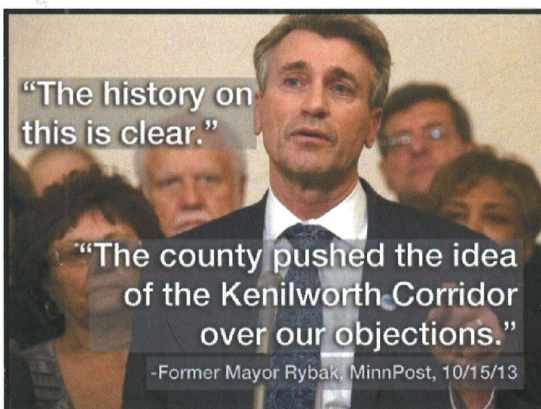
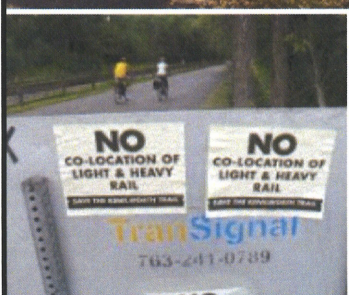
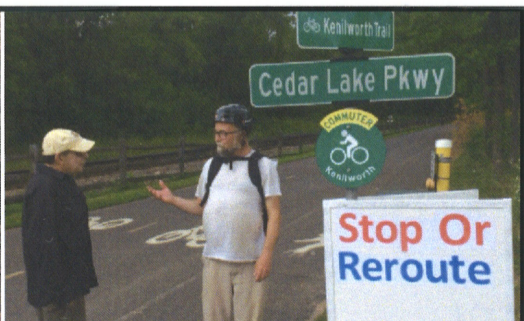
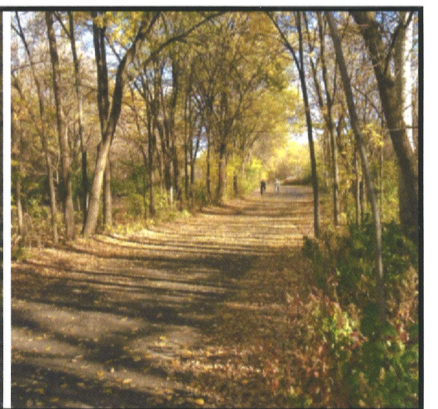
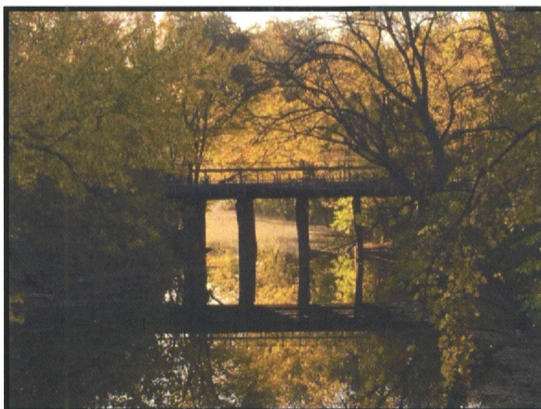
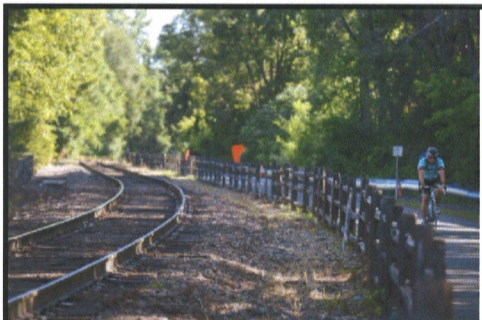
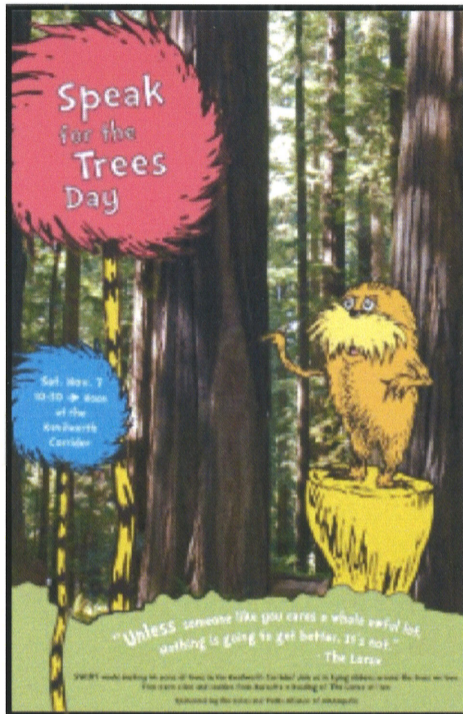
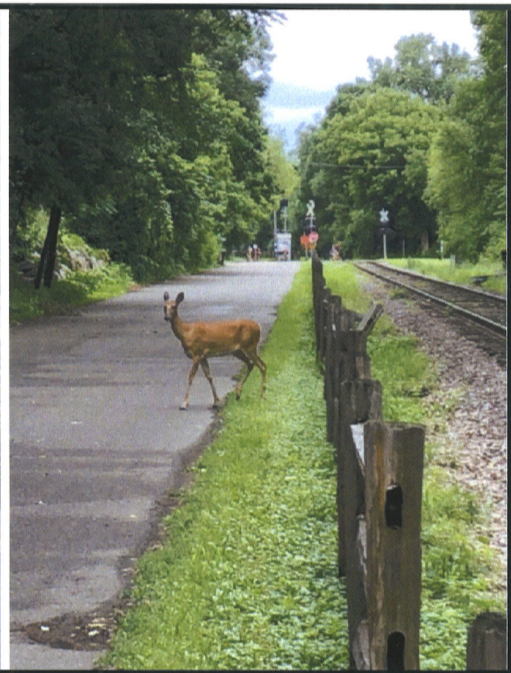
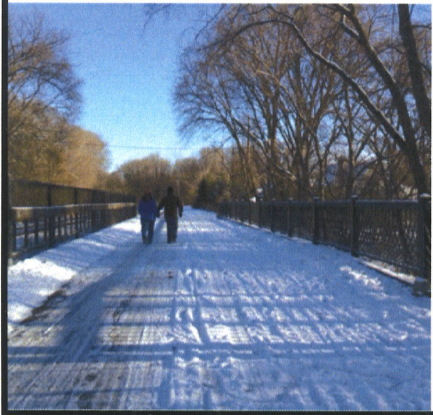
Meanwhile, on April 5, 2019, Governor Walz

(To **Rusty-Patched bumble bees**, p. 4)

**Kenilworth memories**

See page 2 for a photomontage.

# Hill & Lake Press



(Photomontage: Michael Wilson)

Office of Governor Tim Walz & Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan  
130 State Capitol  
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Governor Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan,

We are writing to you on behalf of Kenilworth Preservation Group (KPG), Lakes & Parks Alliance of Minneapolis (LPA), Cedar-Isles-Dean Neighborhood Association (CIDNA), Kenwood Neighborhood Organization and LRT Done Right.

We ask for your assistance in preserving the integrity of the Kenilworth Corridor green space by suspending the Met Councils plan to begin cutting down trees in the corridor in the upcoming weeks for SWLRT, until **full funding** from the FTA is absolutely certain.

Federal funding of SWLRT is highly uncertain. As of now, the Met Council has only received a commitment of 245 days of construction reimbursement from the FTA. The FTA has not even invited the Met Council to APPLY for a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA). The Met Council is a long way from receiving federal APPROVAL of a FFGA and faces many funding uncertainties.

Once we destroy this corridor between the Chain of Lakes, we cannot alter the consequences. It would be a terrible oversight of this administration to allow this park setting to be destroyed without 100% certainty that the light rail will indeed be funded/built. Please note that this is not simply a neighborhood request. According to the Met Council's own data, more than 600,000 people use and enjoy this corridor every year.

Although we understand the need to start the project, destroying full-grown trees that will take 25+ years to replace is gross negligence should the project be delayed or altered.

Hennepin County Chair Marion Green informed the Cedar-Isles-Dean neighborhoods that Hennepin County hired a lobbying group to convince the FTA to approve full funding. We have since learned they hired Cardinal Infrastructure at a cost of \$200,000.00.

Why would the State of Minnesota / Met Council destroy one of the most pristine areas of the region until they know for absolute certainty that full federal funding has been approved?

In addition, SWLRT still faces an active lawsuit in Federal Court and potential for another suit to be brought. There are many uncertainties in this corridor that are unresolved.

While we have been criticized for not supporting SWLRT, we have stood firm in our resolve that the route, along with co-location of freight rail and LRT, have been at the core of our debate, not the need for it.

We were promised that co-location would NOT happen in this corridor. Our burden is now extreme and the very park-like setting of this great city will be destroyed beyond repair.

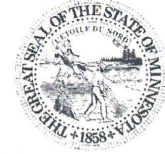
We ask that you impose a moratorium on tree-cutting in the Kenilworth Corridor until the Met Council can show that it has received the FFGA for the federal governments share for the entire project, along with any/all remaining funding that is needed.

Thank you for your consideration and time.

Stuart Chazin (Chair/Kenilworth Preservation Group)  
David Lilly (Chair/Lakes and Parks Alliance of Minneapolis)  
Mary Pattock (Chair/Cedar-Isles-Dean Neighborhood Association)  
Shawn Smith (Chair/Kenwood Neighborhood Organization)  
Jeanette Colby (Founding Member, LRT Done Right)  
Curt & Catherine Gunsbury (Board Member LPA)  
George and Catherine Puzak (Board Member LPA)  
Jim & Cindie Smart



Minneapolis  
Park & Recreation Board



Minnesota Senate  
&  
Minnesota House  
of Representatives



April 12, 2019

Nora Slawik, Chair  
Metropolitan Council  
390 Robert St N  
St Paul MN 55101

Dear Chair Slawik,

We understand that the plan to remove the trees in the Kenilworth Corridor to make way for Southwest LRT construction is set for April or May.

We know that receipt of the Letter of No Prejudice has been taken as an indication by the Metropolitan Council that the Full Funding Grant Agreement is a mere formality and may be issued soon. However, we are also aware that the current federal administration has not been finalizing and releasing transit project funds for projects that would otherwise have been deemed ready to go.

*We urge you in the strongest terms possible to delay clear cutting the trees in the corridor until all possible impediments to the construction of SWLRT have been resolved.*

As you know, the bucolic character of this corridor is prized by many. It is heavily used. In the event that SWLRT does not proceed for any reason, elimination of this unique, urban forest preserve and passageway would be a reckless and irreversible mistake. At a minimum, should construction be delayed for whatever reason, losing the ability to enjoy it for this spring and summer season would be a shame.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding in this matter.

Very truly yours,

D. Scott Dibble  
State Senator, District 61

Frank Hornstein  
State Representative, District 61A

Lisa Goodman  
City Council Member, Ward 7

Jono Cowgill  
Park Commissioner, District 4

Meg Forney  
Park Commissioner, At Large

LaTrisha Vetaw  
Park Commissioner, At Large

(From **Kenilworth Deforestation**, p. 1)

through his policy advisor, said that he "does not have the legal authority to impose a moratorium on tree-cutting in the Kenilworth Corridor." Slawik said that due to the complexities of contracts and work schedules, calling a moratorium at this point might jeopardize the project.

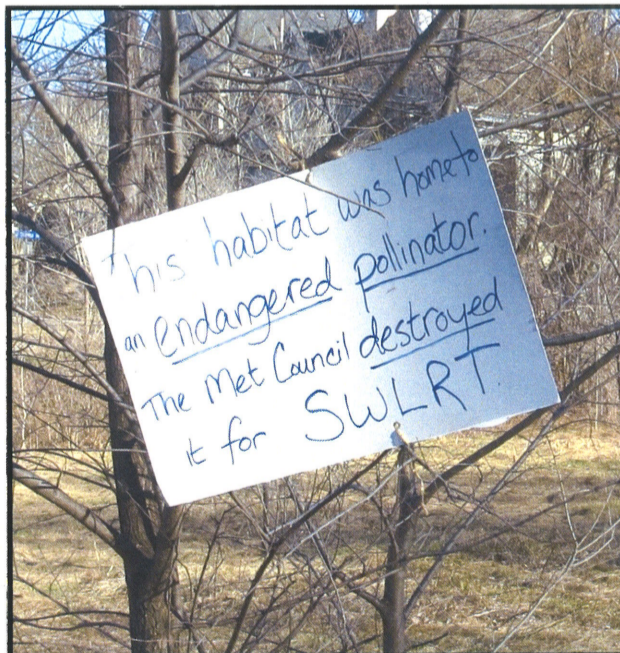
If the Kenilworth alignment were unquestionably the best route for serving the citizens of Minneapolis, that'd be one thing. But it's not the best route, or even a so-so route. It's the **WORST** route for serving the people of the south side of Minneapolis.

Right from the day of its creation on October 21, 1980, the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) has viewed the Kenilworth Corridor as the best -- and indeed the only -- route for a light-rail line from the southwest suburbs into downtown Minneapolis, but the plan has faced problems and conflict from the start. "Light rail transit through neighborhood is temporarily derailed," read the banner headline on page 1 of the October 1984 Hill & Lake Press.

#### Failure of government transportation policy.

An Alternatives Analysis in 2009 considered two routes through Minneapolis: route 3A, through the Kenilworth Corridor; and route 3C, along the HCRRA-owned Midtown Greenway and then through a tunnel under Nicollet Avenue. Data were collected but everyone knew the outcome was pre-ordained.

Google "Transport Politic Southwest Minneapolis" for an astoundingly prescient article from August



April 20 (Saturday), 2019. (Photo: Michael Wilson.)

2009 titled "Southwest Minneapolis' Transit Route Selection Process May Rule Out Light Rail to Uptown."

Citizen input "could be essential [in the Alternatives Analysis process]," the author, Yonah Freemark, wrote, "because planners are currently angling to make the wrong decision about where trains should run. Their endorsement of a route through low-density neighborhoods in place of a more expensive line through Minneapolis' lively Uptown is symptomatic of the failure of government transportation policy in addressing the needs of inhabitants of dense inner city communities."

The effect of route 3A on the commutes of people who live in Minneapolis would be "marginal," Freemark wrote; "Route 3C would be far more effective in encouraging transit use in Minneapolis. ... Building light rail along 3A instead of 3C is almost an invitation to drive to Uptown rather than take transit there."

SWLRT planning has been marked for years by a bull-headed determination to keep plowing ahead with the Kenilworth route even when roadblocks and increasingly compelling data should have led reasonable people to conclude, "Let's reconsider. Maybe we got it wrong. Maybe there is a better way."

The prime example came in December 2012 when Twin Cities & Western (TC&W) railroad, which had been "temporarily" using the Kenilworth Corridor since 1998 and which planners always assumed would accept relocation through St. Louis Park, shocked everyone by saying they could not accept the chosen reroute and would instead remain in the Kenilworth Corridor.

The new reality of the highly problematic, hugely expensive co-location of freight and LRT was the moment when the Kenilworth route should have been reconsidered. But that's the sort of thing Hennepin County and the Met Council abhor. For them it's always been "full speed ahead."

#### Fighting an uphill battle.

Residents of Cedar-Isles-Dean and Kenwood and their neighborhood associations, grassroots citizen groups like LRT Done Right, Kenilworth Preservation Group, and Lakes and Parks Alliance, and many

(To **Kenilworth Deforestation**, p. 4)



On April 26 the arrival of spring in the Kenilworth Corridor was no longer a promise but a reality as trees began leafing out, their branches arching over bikers and walkers with that light-green viridescence of early May. Some have scoffed at trying to protect scrub or early succession trees. Would they rise to the Corridor's defense if it were filled instead with basswood, white oak and black ash trees? (Photos and captions: Michael Wilson.)

American Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium montanum*) carpets the Kenilworth Corridor between the foot of Washburn Avenue and the freight track and Kenilworth Channel bridge. This is the last year you'll be able to enjoy their springtime beauty, though. The freight track will soon be moved -- permanently -- over to the edge of the corridor right-of-way to make room for SWLRT.

(From **Rusty-Patched bumble bees**, p. 1)

signed an executive order explicitly protecting the rusty patched bumble bee and other imperiled pollinators. Too late for our friends along the Kenilworth Trail. For the record.

[Go to [rustypatched.com](http://rustypatched.com) to learn more about the bees. Go to [vimeo.com/149689195](http://vimeo.com/149689195) to watch the film "A Ghost in the Making: Searching for the Rusty-Patched Bumble Bee."]

(From **Kenilworth Deforestation**, p. 3)

allies have worked hard to demonstrate why the Kenilworth alignment is bad for Minneapolis and for the environment, but it's been a tough battle when you're up against five suburban cities, deep-pocketed developers, and glib politicians with well-funded PR machines. (Hennepin County currently has a \$200,000 contract with PR firm Cardinal Infrastructure to help ram SWLRT through.)

Instead of considering the facts and joining forces to find a route that would benefit the citizens of Minneapolis as well as suburban residents, the get-it-done SWLRT backers decided instead to mock Kenilworth activists as self-serving NIMBYs -- ignoring the Park Board's estimate that the corridor has 786,000 visits per year. That's some backyard!

SWLRT backers and politicians stuck doggedly to their script that light rail was good for the region. They refused to tell us why the Kenilworth route will serve southside and midtown Minneapolis residents best by bypassing them completely.

Some critics like to snipe at the corridor's defenders and point out that Kenilworth was a rail corridor in the past, implying that usage patterns of 1899 remain perfectly acceptable today. (We wonder if they feel the same way about the Mississippi riverfront.)

Other critics like to grouse that the corridor is expendable because many of the trees are low-quality.



April 5 was the day when the Met Council's compact track loader lumbered into the "prairie" on the east side of the Kenilworth Corridor between 21st Street and the Burnham bridge for some secret "vegetation management," leaving only stubble in its wake and killing all the hibernating Rusty-Patched bumble bee gynes (or queens) whose eggs would have started the colony anew this spring. Their sin? They got in the way of SWLRT. Someone should warn the bluebirds that their house is next to go. (Photo: Jeanette Colby.)

That truly is missing the forest for the trees.

**Many people have labored mightily.**

In his 2009 article Yonah Freemark wrote, "Rather than focusing on the commuting needs of suburbanites, planners and politicians should be concentrating their transit funds on encouraging a car-free lifestyle for people who live in inner-city areas. People who live in already existing, dense, mixed-use neighborhoods are most likely to be those who choose to take transit, walk, and bike, and we should be working for their benefit. Yet the almost inevitable choice of the

3A [Kenilworth] alignment indicates that government today, even in its transit policy, isn't doing so."

True words in 2009, and even more so today. Think how hugely midtown Minneapolis has changed in just the past ten years -- how Bennett Lumber used to occupy whole city blocks, how a few hundred residents have been joined by many thousands more.

Think of the city's intense focus on densification and on increasing transit options -- which it has neither the money nor the magic wand to make happen on its own.

Think of how completely this mass-transit SWLRT line fails to serve the masses of Minneapolis residents in Uptown, Lyn-Lake, Whittier, south and southwest.

SWLRT is *not* "the little engine that could," as some would have it, moving pluckily forward in the face of endless, niggling opposition from NIMBYs who want to protect their backyard views.

Rather, SWLRT is a juggernaut, championed by developers, suburban cities, and the Hennepin County board, whose route through the Kenilworth Corridor was decided upon in the early 1980s and whose backers have remained resolutely blind to the folly of insisting that a mass-transit line bypass the tens of thousands of residents and potential riders in south Minneapolis.

Many people have labored mightily to keep this fateful first step of clear-cutting the corridor from happening, working on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of people who use and love the corridor -- many of whom will receive a rude jolt in three weeks when they find their beloved trail closed.

The end of April 2019 finds us downhearted at the deforestation we apparently have been unable to forestall. We are dismayed at the lost opportunity to benefit our city's southsiders with a mass-transit line. We mourn the destruction of an endangered bee habitat and the diminishment of habitat for all the living things that call the Kenilworth Corridor "home" -- including ourselves.