

October 21, 2025

Baxter City Council
City of Baxter
13190 Memorywood Dr.
Baxter, MN 56425

Dear Mayor Olson and Council Members,

As Baxter business owners and leaders, we're writing in opposition to MNDOT's proposed "buttonhook" interchange for Highway 371/210. We respect the responsibility you carry as elected officials and your openness to hearing directly from the business community.

When the Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce offered conditional support for this project, it was with the clear understanding that the project team would gather business feedback and then use it to improve design concepts. While we've had several meetings, surveys and discussions, many of our key concerns haven't been addressed.

A June/July 2025 survey of 70 Baxter businesses revealed that:

- *60% rate the proposed design as poor or very poor, and 71% want changes*
- *51% expect revenue losses, with one-third predicting long-term or permanent impacts*
- *20% say they may be forced to close, relocate or sell*
- *1 out of 3 customers are tourists or out-of-town visitors, making business access and visibility critical to our economy*

While we appreciate MNDOT's efforts, here are the key reasons we believe the buttonhook design is not the right solution for Baxter:

Tourism and Local Economy

Baxter is the gateway to the Lakes Area, welcoming thousands of visitors every year. The buttonhook design would speed traffic past our commercial core. Complicated navigation loops and backtracking would confuse visitors and discourage them from stopping, threatening a major economic driver.

Custom Design Flexibility

This isn't a standard, off-the-shelf interchange but a custom design. By definition, that means there are options and opportunities to make adjustments. The buttonhook concept cannot be the only workable solution.

Corridors of Commerce Goals

The state program behind this project is intended to strengthen Minnesota's economy by improving freight movement and regional commerce. This design does not achieve that. Instead of supporting growth, the buttonhook threatens businesses and discourages future investment.

Fundamental Fairness

Baxter's business owners have invested years of hard work and significant resources to build our livelihoods, employ local residents and grow the city's tax base. To now separate many of us from potential customers isn't just unfair—it's devastating, and it puts our very survival on the line.

A Baxter City Council vote to decline municipal consent is not a rejection of needed improvements. It is a firm request for a design that better balances mobility with the needs of the community. If state funding is denied, it would be unfortunate, but the responsibility would not rest with the Council. Future opportunities for support will certainly arise.

What's at stake today is keeping Baxter's business district strong, protecting property values and tax base, and holding onto a road system that—*while not perfect*—gets the job done most of the year. It's simply not worth rolling the dice on a design that could put all of that at risk.

We respectfully urge you to withhold municipal consent until MNDOT meaningfully re-engages with the Chamber and local businesses to develop a more business-friendly design.

With the project slated for 2028-29, there is still time to get this right. Working together, we can achieve both traffic improvements and economic strength for Baxter.

Thank you for standing up for the long-term interests of our community.

Sincerely,

3 Cheers Hospitality
ABC Seamless
Abra Auto Body
Accucare Audiology
Arnold S. Johnson Properties
Baxter AmericInn
Baxter Holiday on Excelsior
Baymont Inn & Suites
Bercher Design & Construction
Black Bear Lodge & Saloon
Boulder Tap House
Brainerd General Rental
Brainerd Lively Auto (Mills Honda)
Brainerd Shopper
Bremer Bank/Old National Bank
Brett Laugen State Farm
Brighter Horizons Adult Day Services
Caribou Coffee
Cash Wise Liquor
Century 21 Brainerd Realty
Century Electric and Equipment Repair
Christmas Point

Coldstone Creamery
Conductor Power
Cowell Financial
Crow Wing Chiropractic
Curated Closet
Days Inn & Suites
Deb Mitzel Creative
Deerwood Bank
Diane K Dubej CPA
Dondelinger Automotive
Edina Realty
Elite Sleep / GERT Global
Essentia Health
First Baptist Church/Lake Region Christian School
First Western Bank & Trust
FitQuest Athletic Club
Floor Pro
Frandsen Bank and Trust
Gammello-Pearson
Grizzly's Wood Fired Grill
Gullview Technologies

Hill River & Company
Hole In the Day Investments
Holiday Inn Express
Home Instead
J. Hanson Real Estate Group - Edina Realty
Jim's Electric
Juno Investments
Just For Kix
Kiln Kat Studios
Lakes Area Alano Association
Lakes Area Eyecare
Lakes Dental Care
Legacy Automotive
Lemieux Wealth Strategies
Lifestyle Wellness Clinic
Lighthouse Beginnings
LINDAR Corporation
MCI Carpet One
Metrology Parts
Mills GM Buick
Mills Automotive Group, Inc.
Mills AutoXtreme
Mills Motor, Inc. (Mills Ford, Mills Lincoln)
Mills Property Investments
Mills Truck Center
Morey's Seafood Markets
National Insurance Brokers Hice Agency
North Central Medical Supply & Equipment
Panache Salon & Day Spa
Paper Storm
Pillsbury Forest Ventures LLC
Pizza Ranch

Play It Again Sports
Poncho & Lefty's Tex-Mex Grill
Positive Realty
Pure X Hale LLC
Radco Truck Accessory Store
Rafferty's Pizza
Rapid River Lodge
Red Ribbon Consulting
Reichert Enterprises
RG Insurance
S & R Quisberg
Sazama Family Chiropractic & Wellness
Shine On Speech Therapy
Shoe Sensation
Stonehouse Coffee
Studio North Photography
Tangled Anchor
The Body Workshop
The BodyWorks Collision Center
The Great Furniture Gallery
The Lodge at Brainerd Lakes
The Miller Group - Edina Realty
The Simple Approach
Trinity Business Partners Inc.
Vision Electrical Services
Vision Technology
Weizenegger Engel Insurance
Woodridge Townhome Assn
Zahn Power Group
ZPG Capital

(Total of 104 Baxter businesses & organizations)