

215 6th Street South
Apartment #410
La Crosse, WI 54601

City of La Crosse Common Council
City Hall
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

RE: REACH Zoning Petition

Greetings,

As you may know, the REACH Center serves as a first-of-its-kind “hub” for those who are experiencing and/or at risk of homelessness, or in need of other support services they need to start down the path of stable housing and personal goal achievement. By offering these life-saving services in a centralized location, participants can readily access several agencies at once. The City of La Crosse and La Crosse County have since launched a coordinated effort called “Pathways Home” to significantly reduce homelessness in our city within the next five years, with the REACH Center identified as a potential starting point **for even more efficient connections to resources for this vulnerable population.**

Homeless adults have more intensive dental problems, such as periodontal disease and edentulism (a complete lack of teeth); however, their use of dental services is lower than the general population’s. They have no money, health insurance, or permanent residence, and healthcare providers are often unwilling to serve them. Being unable to make and keep appointments are additional barriers, while chronic or prolonged homelessness also impacts oral health. The longer an individual is homeless, the more missing or decayed teeth they may have. Missing teeth diminish self-esteem and impair an individual’s ability to eat, get a job, and, ultimately, return to mainstream society.

Indeed, poor oral health is a significant barrier to employment in our community and thus impedes pathways out of homelessness. People with visible dental issues such as myself have faced difficulty obtaining employment or accessing some services in our community, and **I understand that many times**

a person's quality of life and sense of self-worth can change dramatically when their oral health can be finally taken care of.

In addition to preventive, restorative, and urgent care services, I also understand that dental fears and anxieties about the appearance of their teeth are real concerns for this part of our community and must be incorporated into the design and implementation of any oral health care services provided by the REACH Center and Scenic Bluffs Health Center to be truly effective. Scenic Bluffs is one of the few dental providers in the area that accepts Medicaid insurance for dental services, and your approval of this rezoning request will make way for those efficient connections to resources for this vulnerable population – **by expanding its services to involve dental care professionals in collaboration with community care workers to understand and meet the needs of marginalized individuals in La Crosse, Wisconsin.**

When the REACH Center opened its doors to our community, I stood alongside local leaders and elected officials united in the hope of ending homelessness and making La Crosse a better place for everyone. I hold fast to that hope now and gladly submit this letter in full support of its most recent application for new Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) zoning.

With gratitude,

Randall Brown