

Craig, Sondra

From: Troy Richter <troyrichter4816@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 3:02 PM
To: Craig, Sondra; ZZ Council Members
Subject: UWL Parking Ramp Makes Sense

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Sondra,

Please include this letter of support for the council's agenda item 24-0068.

City Council Members,

After attending the Judiciary and Administration Committee meeting on March 5th, I feel compelled to contact you regarding the failure to recommend the rezoning request for 221 16th Street North for the UWL parking ramp project (24-0068). This small parcel is part of an existing large surface parking lot. Approving the rezoning request will make the zoning classification consistent with the rest of the lot. This project also **aligns with the mission of the City Council and several of its priorities** (safety, infrastructure, relationships, and community engagement).

I am a daily rider of the MTU from the far southside of La Crosse to the corner of Cass and 16th Streets. From there, I walk .75 miles to my office on the UWL campus. I am the Director of Parking Services, and I ride the bus! It works for me, and I make this choice for many reasons including wellness, environmental, and financial. This does not mean it works for others.

I have many conversations with students, families, and employees about alternative ways to get to and from campus and around town. I encourage them not to bring a vehicle to campus. However, there are many justifiable needs for having a vehicle on campus. These include employment, medical appointments, school requirements away from UWL (student teaching, internships, community service), military service, and providing care for family. We prioritize those with ADA hangtags and those with approved accommodations from our ACCESS Center. Our permit sale is based on class standing, as there is no feasible way to determine whose need is more legitimate. To suggest restricting or banning student vehicles to campus is misguided. We need to meet the needs of our students, employees, and visitors.

UWL is committed to the environment and is involved in research, education, and partnerships with local, state, and national efforts to improve our environment. In compliance with the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA) an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared for the parking ramp project. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released to the public on March 15, 2023. There was no opposition during the meetings.

Building vertically with a parking ramp maximizes land use efficiency, allowing the University to preserve valuable ground space for academic buildings, green spaces, and other campus amenities. This **project incorporates many sustainability features** like EV charging stations, stormwater management, LED lighting, covered bike parking, and a future solar canopy. If parking demand decreases in future years, surface lots can be converted to green spaces. A recently constructed temporary lot will be restored to green space at the conclusion of the project. Additionally, there have been many discussions in the parking industry about adaptive reuse of parking structures for residential, office, or retail space. While this would be a costly conversion, it remains an option for future use.

A well-lit and monitored parking ramp **provides a safer environment** for our students, employees and visitors. The new parking ramp will help alleviate a parking shortage on campus and will reduce the number of vehicles parking on congested streets surrounding campus. UWL currently maintains 2792 stalls for 10,314 students, 1200 employees, and numerous daily visitors. A parking ramp will serve the southwest side of campus and the many events held in the Truman T. Lowe Center for the Arts and Centennial Hall.

The ramp project will have a projected **economic impact** of \$39,710,880. There are negative economic consequences if this rezoning request is denied. Fewer students will be able to have jobs in town without access to a vehicle. Local business owners struggle to find workers to fill their positions. Fewer students will be able to provide community service and participate in area schools, businesses and community organizations through internships and student teaching without access to a vehicle. This would be detrimental to our schools, local businesses, and organizations.

UWL strives to be a **great neighbor**. We work with neighborhood associations (this project is supported by the Grandview Emerson Neighborhood Association), we partner with employers and organizations in the community, and we collaborate on several large events like the WIAA State Track Meet and Oktoberfest. Recently, UWL exchanged a small area of land with the city to make construction of the new fire station on La Crosse Street possible. If common ground was found on that important project, surely common ground can be found on rezoning a small portion of an existing parking lot.

In conclusion, this rezoning request makes sense. The ramp will provide **numerous benefits** from improved accessibility and safety to sustainability and economic development. By addressing the practical parking needs of campus, this project can contribute to a more vibrant and inclusive city. As discussed in this letter, this project aligns with the mission of the City Council and several of its priorities (safety, infrastructure, relationships, and community engagement).

Sincerely,

Troy Richter

La Crosse Resident for more than 35 years

