



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
LA CROSSE

June 18, 2018

Members of the Common Council
C/o City Clerk Teri Lehrke
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601



RE: Item #18-0221 Resolution selecting design concept "B1" for the La Crosse Center remodeling and expansion and appropriating additional funding for the project.

Dear Members of the La Crosse Common Council:

I hereby veto the above referenced legislation. The proposed legislation requests more funding on top of the \$42 million committed for this project. The legislation also selects design "B1," which shows an expansion unnecessarily jutting out into Riverside Park in direct conflict with John Nolen's seminal park plan from 1911.

This veto is not about a lack of support for the La Crosse Center remodeling and expansion project, the board or staff. On the contrary, there is broad community support for this effort and I have advocated for this project from day one.

This veto is not about the proposed architecture. However, in my opinion the current design lacks inspiration and detracts from the aesthetics at one of the most beautiful and historic sites anywhere on the Mississippi River. It does not honor La Crosse's history, nor does it demonstrate any passion – it is big, plain, flat box. La Crosse deserves better.

This veto is about concept B1 unnecessarily encroaching into the region's most loved park. John Nolen's 1911 park plan showed the area as open space. Concept B1 conflicts with that plan. We heard comments at the June council meeting about this project representing this generation's "legacy." Rather than worrying about names on the commemorative building plaque, the council should get back to what they were elected for – to be good stewards of this community's resources. Needless removing park land is not being a good steward of these blessings.

This expansion can be accomplished without eliminating open space. Earlier studies showed the addition without wiping out park space by expanding to the north, over the parking and loading areas. It is not necessary to intrude into Riverside Park and yet we are being lectured that B1 is our only option. For the amount of funding being provided by city taxpayers for design – more than \$3 million – my expectation is that the architects will be relentless and creative in overcoming all of the site's constraints, without causing more problems.

Concept B1 also ignores income generating space on the east side of the building – such as a new atrium at Second and Pearl Streets. This is a space to connect people to downtown’s vibrancy and earn revenues – yet the barren concrete area out front remains.

This veto is about the common council’s lack of fiscal discipline. This request for another \$7.2 million in borrowed funds will require us to raise property taxes. We have come too far as an organization with strong financial management. This request for more money will create negative circumstances for city operations. This additional borrowing will negatively impact street repairs and future fire stations.

Another problem – the \$49.2 million is not enough to fund concept B1 as shown. How can the common council approve legislation for a project of this magnitude when all of the costs are not identified?

These additional costs for protruding into the park include moving a massive underground electrical transmission line, hydrological studies of the Mississippi River, floodplain and flood proofing measures, new plantings, new playground equipment, and other “yet to be identified” improvements. None of these costs are included within the \$49.2 million and all of these costs can be avoided by not encroaching into the park.

My guess is the original \$42 million project will grow to \$52 million and more. Does the common council believe we have unlimited funds?

Testimony at the June meeting raised questions about the floodway, about the park’s designation on the national register of historic places and about not understanding all of the project’s costs. These concerns are not “details to be worked out later” as some suggest. These are essential questions that impact the scope and cost of this project. Not knowing answers to these questions is poor financial and project stewardship.

I recommend the La Crosse Center board and architects get back to work and reconfigure the space to avoid Riverside Park. The board and architects should work with the \$42 million approved by the common council or find additional non-property tax revenues. We will live with this project for decades. It is critical we remember our role as stewards of this community and preserve one of the most beautiful places anywhere.

This veto puts our community’s financial and park plans back in order.

For those common council members who wish to protect our community’s true legacy – Riverside Park – I encourage you to sustain this veto. Only then can we develop options for expanding the La Crosse Center without eliminating park land.

Sincerely,



Mayor Tim Kabat

C: Council Members 6-18-18
C: News Media