



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Meeting Minutes - Final

### Neighborhood Revitalization Commission

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Monday, August 3, 2020

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

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In an effort to keep members of the public, City staff and Council Members as safe as possible from the spread of COVID-19, the committee meetings will be conducted through video conferencing.

The meetings can be viewed using the following link:

<https://stream.lifesizecloud.com/extension/4796124/c7d43560-fea7-4613-9625-63af875bee87>

Members of the public who would like to provide comments on any agenda item are encouraged to submit them in writing prior to the respective meeting. Written comments should be submitted to Tim Acklin at [acklint@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:acklint@cityoflacrosse.org), dropped in a drop box outside of City Hall or mailed to the Planning Department, 400 La Crosse Street, La Crosse WI 54601.

#### Call to Order

*The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm.*

**Present:** 8 - Tim Kabat, Linda Lee, Ralph Geary, Jennifer Trost, Jim Bagniewski, Nora Garland, Larry Slezniow, Christopher Woodard

**Excused:** 1 - Janet Allen

**Absent:** 2 - Steve Nicolai, Will Kratt

#### Roll Call

#### Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of the June 1, 2020 Meeting Minutes.

Larry Slezniow moved to approve the minutes. Linda Lee seconded. The motion was approved by voice vote 8-0.

#### Agenda Items:

2. [20-1062](#) Review and Possible Action on the NRC Statement: End racially disproportionate policing through changes to appropriations of public funds, August 2020.

Jennifer Trost stated that the Commission is likely aware of the public protests

against police brutality nationwide and that there was a march in La Crosse after George Floyd was killed by police. Afterwards the La Crosse Police Department offered to make its records and activity more transparent to the public. They now have a dedicated website for this transparency. Jennifer then stated that she went to the website and started looking at their information. She stated that they have a variety of links and list their annual reports here. One such link is "Use of Force" which includes two reports. One report is from 2018 and one is from 2019. In 2018 they documented 87 incidents and provide the types of techniques and type of resistance. They also provide the age, race, and gender of the individual who they have used this force against. Jennifer then stated that if you look at the race statistic in 2018 you see 18 instances out of 87 were black and in 2019 you have 34 out of 103 instances that were black. This shows the disproportionate use of force against African Americans and blacks because if you look at the Census data it says that 3 to 4% of La Crosse is African American. Jennifer then stated that the website has other statistics and other background information that the public can look at. Jennifer then asked if the Commission had any questions.

Nora Garland stated that she looked at this data as well as other national data ahead of the meeting so she was familiar with issue. She asked Jennifer if the disproportionality is about crimes committed and demographics instead of just Census figures and demographics. Nora stated that when you look at national figure the amount of crime committed by race is not proportional to the Census either and did not think that Census data should be data looked at. Jennifer stated that she was using the Census data so that you could see the context of the La Crosse population. Nora stated that she just did not think it was enough. In looking at this issue we would not want this to be the only context that we would be making a recommendation on.

Jennifer Trost stated that she would like the Commission to feel that this is an issue that they can comment on. That they see things in their neighborhoods and try to represent all of the neighborhoods in the City and that the Commission will feel that this is an appropriate issue for them to comment on. She then stated that this is what she trying to convince to the Commission of today, that they have a reason to care about disproportionate policing in our neighborhoods as the body that they are which is simply a recommending body to the Council. Hoping that the Commission can weigh in on disproportionate use of force by the police. If there are issues with the statistics that might be a separate issue. Is there a question about the statistics or if these is issue is relevant enough for this Commission to make a comment on. Nora stated that she thought it was relevant but was not sure if the comment she took away from the document was justified of the Police Department without additional context. Concerned about the use of the term "disproportionate". Jennifer stated that if you have a population that is 90% white then 90% of police force should also be against white people. Fits definition of disproportionate. Nora stated that she does not agree with that statement. Can be based on the types of crime in the community which can be disproportionate in terms of racial statistics.

Chris Woodard stated that the Census data being referenced is ten years old. A lot can change in ten years. Chris stated that he does not think the Commission should be making recommendations to re-appropriate funds from the Police as they do a great job for the City. Nora Garland stated that she would like to hear

from the Police Department. She has read all the reports online, the Police Department has been nationally recognized for their DART Program, has committed to training for mental health responses, and stated that there are a lot things the Police Department is doing well. Like any human organization there are likely things they can improve on but based on simply one data point she does not feel comfortable making those statements. Not a lot of other evidence to support it.

Linda Lee stated that this is looking at just incidents. It is not specifically looking at the number of people. So a person could have five incidents which could skew the numbers. She would like to see the number of individuals and that data. She also asked about the increase in the budget and was interested in what the increase in their budget was for. Mayor Kabat stated that he was aware of the considerable amount of concern expressed to the City about the recent budget issues and cuts. He provided data on the individual department budgets over that last several years. There was an increase in the Police Department. The increase in their budget was to mostly to fund the Neighborhood Resource Officers and gone to community policing. Mayor Kabat also provided additional statistics that illustrated that La Crosse's Police Department was not disproportionably funded when compared to our peer cities.

Jim Bagniewski thanked Jennifer for bringing this to the Commission. He asked if there was any data on resisting arrests. Jennifer shared a report with the Commission and stated that if the questions are being asked about if blacks are committing more crimes or arrested more often or whether black kids are getting suspended from school, or needing more officers, or that we shouldn't say bad things about our Police Departments the Commission should remember that we are in a very long term context when talking about systemic racism. It will outlast any particular administration, any particular group of people, or any particular point in time. Jennifer also stated that the Police Department website does provide statistics on what people are doing when resisting arrest. Jim stated that he would look it over.

Jennifer then provided a tribune article about a traffic stop on West Ave where an individual was wrestled to the ground using a technique called "Hug Yourself Decentralization". Jennifer stated that's the context we are in. It is not just this incident or our City but its the way the entire criminal justice system has been built in order to disproportionally police people of color. Whether this Commission is comfortable discussing this issue is up to the Commission but she would not say people of color commit more crimes, she would say that people of color are policed more often than white people. Jim B. stated that he agreed with that. Jennifer stated that trends support this statement and that La Crosse has historically been a sundown town and the Mayor issued an apology for that. Jennifer also stated that she would argue that our peer cities with larger police budgets than La Crosse are also over policing. Did not want the budget to distract the Commission from discussing the over policing of people of color.

Nora Garland stated that she didn't think this could be resolved today. She stated that she has no argument on systemic racism. It is an issue. She is not sure if relates to policing in La Crosse. She stated that she does not feel that she has enough context or data to answer that. She feels that she does see

many positive trends from our Police Department on this issue. Transparency website is one, mental health training is another, invitation to the public to have citizen members on the Criminal Justice Commission, % of people of color on the police force, etc. Nora stated that she could not support the statement as it stands and would recommend a 2019 research study on how black people feel a certain level of suspicion towards how they are treated by police and also a very high concern for safety and a desire for police maturity in their neighborhoods. She would also recommend an article in Vox that does a great job of getting into the complexity of this issue.

Ralph Geary stated that he shares the concern with Nora about the word "disproportionate". There is a lot of issues that need to be addressed to level the playing field for minorities. He also stated that budgets for cities are going to be stressed over the next couple of years. Mayor works with departments and Council members on budgetary items. He does not feel this Commission would have the whole picture to be able to make budget recommendations. Individually they could make recommendations to their own CM or the Mayor. Maybe have the Chief of Police as a future meeting. Long term the regionalization of services needs to be considered.

CM Padesky stated that he agrees with what Ralph said. He then states that we should be careful to not compare things going on nationally with our own Police Department. Should be careful to question the decisions made during these arrests since we weren't there.

CM Slezniow thanked Jennifer for bringing this to the Committee. He then stated that he agreed with others that he couldn't support this at this time. The one thing that keeps coming back in his mind is that it took the sacrifice of one gentleman and what that led to and then the retrospective look at all the black men and women who have died or been injured because of issues related to arrests or stops. Does feel that systemic racism is an issue on a national level, not sure it is going on here in La Crosse. Would like to see how we approach this issue in La Crosse, especially with our new Police Chief.

Mayor Kabat agreed that these issues will not be going away after a week or so. There are a number of efforts going on to look at how we address systemic racism in our community. He would agree that we do have systemic racism but it is not just in policing, it is also in housing, lending, and many other facets of our lives. It is our responsibility to understand this issue and make improvements. There are a couple of resources, one is 8 Can't Wait which is 8 recommendations for changing policing right now. There is also campaign zero which has 10 recommendations. There is also My Brother's Keeper from the President Obama Foundation that as a report from a couple years ago on policing that also has a lot of good recommendations. Mayor Kabat then stated that many of the recommendations in these reports are being worked on and implemented by our Police Department. One example is having more citizens on the Criminal Justice Council. Also trying to provide more forums that include people of color to be heard. Police are also changing their policy on how they respond to specific calls.

Jennifer Trost stated that if there are 100 incidents of use of force and 30 of them are people of color she is unsure of what the explanation is. Seems to fit national patterns, Wisconsin patterns, historical patterns, etc. Still uncertain of

why we need to increase the size and budgets of police forces when overall crime is going down. There is a lot of debate on what role the police play in the decline of crime as opposed to demographics, changed in sentencing, incarceration, etc. She stated that she would respect the decision of this body. She then stated that she regrets that sometimes white people make themselves feel better by challenging the evidence and in some ways engage in toxic positivity when the system is really quite dangerous for people who experience it differently. Really trying to be a voice for people of color when there are clearly none here. The Criminal Justice Council can't keep their diverse members and keep asking for more. Appreciate the Commission taking the time to look at the information.

Chris Woodward stated that the property crime is declining but the violent crime is not. That is worrisome, especially in his neighborhood. Police Department doing a great job.

Mayor Kabat stated that he gets the impression that there is not support for action on this item today but asked if the Commission had suggestions for changes or requests for information for next month. CM Slezniow stated that he would like to hear from the Police Chief. A lot things they are doing have been discussed and it would great to hear from him and how he is approaching this. He stated that he is still learning and understands that he is white privileged. Would like to keep learning. Mayor Kabat stated that we can invite the Chief to the next meeting and invite everyone to the virtual town hall on policing.

Nora stated that something that might be useful to hear from the Police Chief is more on proactive policing measures and how that relates to the cost of policing. May help them understand the cost issue a little more. Mayor Kabat agreed.

No action was taken on this item.

3. [20-1063](#)

Update and Discussion on City use of Public Space during the pandemic.

Staff provided an update on the efforts the City has been working on in regards to utilizing outdoor space during the pandemic. Staff informed the Commission that the City recently adopted an Outdoor Cafe Program that allows restaurants to expand into public sidewalks, public parking spaces, or even some roads for outside dining. Also include adjacent green spaces and parking lots on their own parcel. Staff provided some additional program details. Staff also addressed an item on the memo related to signage for curbside pickup. Staff stated that signs were posted all over the City in front of businesses upon request.

Jennifer asked how businesses would be aware of this program. Staff stated that the media has covered it fairly well but a press release will be issued and a website has been created. Mayor Kabat stated that DMI and the Downtown CM started the initiative to have curbside signage. Has been nice to see everyone come together to put this together in such a short time.

Chris Woodard moved to adopt the statement that the Neighborhood Revitalization Commission invites and supports new uses of public streets during the pandemic. Nora Garland seconded. The motion passed 8-0 by voice

vote.

4. Affordable Housing Pattern Book Project.

Staff informed the Commission of the project to create a pattern book on affordable housing designs. Project still in the early stages. Received a La Crosse Community Foundation Grant. Trying to address an affordable housing issue in LaCrosse and develop ideas. May need to change the way of thinking in the industry. Want to include a lot of area organizations to weigh in. Book would include a variety of options for builders.

Mayor Kabat stated that Jason Gilman did show this Commission the need for this project before. Context sensitive design is something this group would be interested in.

CM Slezniow asked if the book would include designs for multifamily buildings in addition to single family. Tim Acklin stated that we were looking into maybe something as high as a 4-unit but need to evaluate how that would work in terms of affordability. Larger purpose would be single family homes. Larry also stated that it could start out as a smaller modular unit home for a family that could be easily added on to in the future. Tim stated that something like that would fit the model and would be considered.

Ralph asked if the income levels in La Crosse are lower than the surrounding municipalities. Staff stated that they were unsure and agreed with Ralph that it could affect the numbers when calculating affordability. Working with the CDBG administrator on what numbers to use.

CM Janssen asked if we had reached out to architects that specialize in sustainability concepts as well as have we considered including options like edible landscaping and cost savings on construction techniques. Will work with the firms on these concepts. CM Janssen also suggested looking at previous modular homes such as the Lustron House which was ahead of its time.

CM Slezniow agreed with CM Janssen on incorporating sustainability concepts in the designs and pattern book. CM Janssen also stated that we should reference the programs that offers rain gardens and rain barrels and the impact they have.

## Adjournment

Next month invite the Police Chief and get an update on the Comp Plan if possible and have the parking study on the agenda. Larry Slezniow moved to adjourn the meeting. Chris Woodard seconded. The motion passed by voice vote 8-0. The meeting was adjourned at 7:33pm.

*Notice is further given that members of other governmental bodies may be present at the above scheduled meeting to gather information about a subject over which they have decision-making responsibility.*

*NOTICE TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY*

*Requests from persons with a disability who need assistance to participate in this meeting should call the City Clerk's office at (608) 789-7510 or send an email to [ADAcityclerk@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:ADAcityclerk@cityoflacrosse.org), with as much advance notice as possible.*