

To: Mayor Mitch Reynolds, J.A. Committee, Planning Commission, Council Member, City Planning, and Council Members

From: Jay Lokken and Ken Riley

Date: June 1, 2021

RE: Opposition to “an ordinance to amend Subsection 115-110 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse transferring certain property from the Washburn Residential District to the Traditional Neighborhood District allowing for an apartment building at 1106-1108 King Street”

We are opposed to this change for the following reasons:

1. It is not in compliance with guidelines which are clearly outlined in the ***Confluence: The La Crosse Comprehensive Plan*** which I had the honor of serving on, as well as playing a significant role in the development of Section 8, Neighborhoods and housing.

Specifically, in Section 8 page 5, following Neighborhood and Housing Objectives are clearly defined. Please see our responses immediately following, and in bold print

Section 8, Summary of Neighborhood and Housing Objectives Neighborhood Improvement

Objective 1: Improve Neighborhood Land Use Planning. Ensure compatible and proper land uses in all neighborhoods – **Transfer of this property from Washburn Residential to Traditional for a 16 plex on a single city lot in a neighborhood comprised mostly of single family and low-density housing.**

Objective 2: Improve Architecture and Urban Design. Improve building and site design of new multiple-family housing and commercial development. **Neighbors and adjoining properties have not had the opportunity to engage the developer on the project as indicated in the Comprehensive Plan**

Objective 3: Improve Public Facilities and Services. Continually rebuild, renovate or improve streets, alleys, lighting, parks, street trees, snow plowing, trash removal, and other City facilities or services. **There has been no conversation with neighborhood regarding the impact of such a high density, 16 plex would have on public facilities in the area.**

Objective 4: Foster Secure Neighborhoods. Reduce the level of crime, both real and perceived, and establish a reputation for La Crosse’s neighborhoods as crime free and peaceful, with a strong relationship between the police and neighborhood residents. **There has been no**

communication from the planning office related to the impact of a density of this size and relationships to neighborhood security.

Objective 5: Use Heritage Preservation to Protect Neighborhoods. Encourage heritage preservation activity as a catalyst for overall housing and neighborhood revitalization. **This change in use dramatically impacts 11th Street between King and Cass which has two national register single families and the historic Van Steenwyck Home. This area borders the National Register 10th and Cass Historic District.**

Objective 6: Actively Market Neighborhoods. Promote the city's neighborhoods and the ongoing revitalization and reinvestment efforts to attract a portion of future regional growth. **This proposal does not promote reinvestment or revitalization of this neighborhood but instead encourages disinvestment and is spot zoning**

Objective 7: Improve Residents' Sense of Community. Empower residents to cooperate for neighborhood improvement. **There has been no formal engagement with the neighbors who adjoin the property, formal presentation or meeting to explain the project and no communication with neighbors from the City Planning Office, in fact, neighbors have had to do the reaching out and research.**

Objective 8: Enhance Citizen Input and Education. Use technology to facilitate public communication and to provide information about ordinance and services. **No opportunity has been provided to neighbor to enhance their input on the change of use.**

Objective 9: Housing Options. Establish a mix of housing options, sizes, prices, styles, and tenancy. **We would support a project with a lower density project with maximum of 4 plex for a single-family lot.**

Objective 10: Increase Home Ownership. Foster the purchase of single-family and two-unit homes for owner-occupancy. **This project does not foster the purchase of single family or two units or the objectives of La Crosse Promise.**

Objective 11: Improve Housing Maintenance and Quality. Continue to encourage proactive housing maintenance and code enforcement. **The density of a project of this size will lead to an exit of home owners in the neighborhood, destroy the neighborhoods historic integrity and further the encroachment of non-conforming uses.**

Objective 12: Populations with Special Needs. La Crosse should work with La Crosse County and other regional agencies to offer a variety of housing options for populations with special needs. **This property would be an excellent opportunity to provide housing similar to 7th street for persons with special needs. Furthermore, it offers an opportunity to develop low density affordable housing in a great neighborhood for families, its location by the YMCA, schools and downtown make it a great fit for La Crosse Promise.**

The following is also stated in the Comprehensive Plan

“The City’s goal is to make La Crosse’s neighborhoods as attractive as possible so that people want to stay or move into the City. The objectives of this plan element are directed at making neighborhoods more desirable places to live, work, and play. The actions identify ways to rejuvenate declining neighborhoods, bolster at-risk neighborhoods, and create new, high-quality neighborhoods. ”

“The actions described in this plan focus on neighborhood stewardship and renewal through attention and investment in the features that make neighborhoods strong. Through the rejuvenation of declining neighborhoods, the bolstering of at-risk neighborhoods, and the creation of quality new neighborhoods, the City will be better able to attract new residents, retain current residents and improve the quality of life for all.

“Overall, many La Crosse neighborhoods contain good quality housing stock and offer a variety of amenities for their residents. These neighborhoods are a major asset to the city, and their health has a direct impact on the health of the larger community. This underscores the importance of focusing attention on City neighborhoods and the features that make them great.”

Section 8, of the Comprehensive Plan

Moreover, this proposal does not meet, from our perspective, with neighborhood stabilization as discussed in the Comprehensive plan. Instead it will lead to further destabilization and encroachment of additional non-conforming uses and does not provide an appropriate mix or balance. See Statement on Section 4, page 2 of the Comprehensive Plan

1. Neighborhood Stabilization

La Crosse is a relatively old city and while many of its neighborhoods are attractive, there are areas where age, inadequate maintenance, and incompatible land uses are eroding the sense of neighborhood stability. These factors can “push” people to relocate their residence or businesses outside La Crosse. To give people and businesses incentives to stay and reinvest in La Crosse neighborhoods, a commitment must be made to proactively respond to the opportunities and challenges facing neighborhoods.

- Do existing neighborhoods provide an appropriate mix and balance of housing types, and land uses (e.g., residential, shops, offices, parks, schools)?
- What can the City do to ensure that new development is compatible with and enhances the character and livability of established neighborhoods?

- How can the City accommodate the continuing growth needs of the major institutions such as the hospitals and colleges without diminishing neighborhood character?
- What can the City do to improve property maintenance and the appearance of older neighborhoods?

Therefore, for the reasons indicated we are opposed to this change and encourage the planning department and the developer to engage the neighbors and property owners and specifically listen to the council member of district who won their respective elections to represent us. We strongly believe that partnerships with neighbors is necessary for the long-term survival of the neighborhood and would lead to an appropriate development that enhances the entire city. We are currently working in partnership with the City of La Crosse to restore the historic Allen home at 203 South 10th. We decided to do this in the best interest of the neighborhood and the 10th and Cass Historic District. The neighborhood has experienced a renaissance but has many challenges facing it. A project of this size, i.e. a four-story apartment in the middle of primarily two story and one-story building is not with the existing neighborhood.

Furthermore, if these densities are approved for this single-family lot, what does that mean long term? Should owners reconsider their single family homes, return them to apartments and move from the neighborhood or the city of La Crosse?