

**CITY OF LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN**  
**CITY PLAN COMMISSION**  
**REPORT**  
**October 4, 2021**

➤ **AGENDA ITEM – 21-1012 (Tim Acklin) (Referred)**

AN ORDINANCE to amend Subsection 115-110 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse transferring certain property from the Public/Semi Public District to the Commercial District allowing for commercial purposes at 520 Veterans Memorial Dr. E.

➤ **ROUTING:** J&A 10.5.21

The Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department is requesting to rezone the property depicted on attached **MAP PC21-1012** from the PS-Public/Semi-Public zoning district to the C2-Commercial zoning district in order to lease the former US Fish Control Lab to a private entity for a commercial use. This proposed rezoning includes the creation of a new parcel around the building and detached garage and rezoning only that newly created parcel. The use of the building as an Airbnb is not permitted in PS-Public/Semi-Public zoning which necessitated the zoning change to C2-Commercial. This option was recommended and preferred by the City Attorney's Office in order to permit this use.

The Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department put together, and sent out, an RFP to solicit proposals for the reuse of the building. The selected proposal was to use the building as wedding/event venue and an Airbnb on the second floor that could be used as part of the event venue or as a separate Airbnb. The adjacent parking lot between the detached garage and main building would be converted into an outdoor reception area and beer garden. The venue would utilize the large parking lot located to the east for the majority, if not all, of its patrons & guests.

Zoning to C2-Commerical from PS-Public/Semi Public would allow the following:

- Any retail, commercial, or office.
- Residential on the upper floor
- General garages, used car lots

It is important to note that the indoor and outdoor concessions and event venue would be permitted in the existing zoning. The Airbnb component is not. It is also important to note that because this parcel is within a public park, and in a publicly owned building, any proposed use and lease agreement under either zoning would have to be approved by the Board of Park Commissioners, and most likely the Common Council.

Additional information and renderings of the proposed use are attached to the legislation.

➤ **GENERAL LOCATION:**

Newly created lot around the US Fish Control Lab building. See attached Certified Survey Map and/or **MAP PC21-1012**.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION OF OTHER BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:**

This item was referred at the August 12, 2021 Common Council meeting in order for the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department to hold public input meetings.

➤ **CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:**

This property is depicted as public and semi-public in the Future Land Use Map of the Comprehensive Plan. This rezoning would not be consistent with this category.

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element

Objective 10: Special Park Facilities. Evaluate possibilities for new facilities, especially athletic complexes and concession facilities, in order to address deficiencies within the park and open space system.

6. Concessions. The City shall evaluate opportunities for the construction of a permanent concession facility in **Riverside Park** or other parks. Any facility that is designed must be done in such a manner that it is complementary to the history and significance of the park. For example, any new structure to be added to Riverside Park should be in the same character as the park gazebo and La Crosse Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau Building. Care would also need to be taken to address floodplain issues when siting this facility. **If it is determined that a concessions facility is needed, the City should evaluate opportunities to operate the facility as publicly owned and privately leased.**

➤ **PLANNING RECOMMENDATION:**

The Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department held public input meetings on September 8<sup>th</sup> and September 13<sup>th</sup> at the South Side Neighborhood Center.

At the meetings the business group whose proposal was selected provided the details of their project and the services they wanted to provide. This included both an indoor and outdoor event venue, one Airbnb unit in the upper floors for no more than ten (10) people, an outdoor concession w/ alcohol and opportunities for local food establishments to operate there, opportunities for food trucks, and areas for local artists to promote/sell their work. They also stated that they do not intend to have hours past midnight and are attempting to communicate with the International Gardens Committee and Rotary Lights to establish a working relationship with them.

The attendees/adjacent property owners at the meeting had concerns about flooding, the impact to the International Gardens, an increase in traffic and inadequate parking, the private use of a public building in a public park, the tenants of the Airbnb and/or event venue being in the park after park hours, serving alcohol in the park, the RFP process, proposed length of lease, use competing with other local businesses, and the overall proposed use.

While the rezoning of a newly created parcel in an existing park to commercial is not ideal from a planning and land use perspective, nor consistent with the Future Land Use Map in the Comprehensive Plan, the private lease of a public facility or park land for specific uses is fairly common throughout the country as a means for municipalities to generate revenue to assist with improvements and maintenance to the park/public land it is located in. In fact, this is fairly common already in La Crosse with the La Crosse Loggers stadium, Pettibone Boat

Club, and Myrick Park Center. Public/private relationships also exist with the management of Forest Hills Golf Course and the Municipal Boat Harbor, not to mention the lease of public/park land for access to privately owned boathouses, the Drift bike share program and the La Crosse Queen. Even the rental of the existing park shelters for birthday and graduation parties is an example of a private lease of a public facility in a park.

Staff is not evaluating the possibility of flooding as part of this petition. The restoration of the building requires specific flood mitigation measures that will help alleviate any impact from potential future flooding. Additionally, any use of this building will have to handle this situation.

Overall, staff has no concerns with the use of this facility for a commercial use that includes a retail or concession type component. Even an office component would be supported. Utilizing the upper floor as an Airbnb is a creative way to use the upper floor of the building. Any use of the building will likely compete on some level with any other local businesses whether it is office space, retail, or concessions. Any use that compliments the park is supported by staff and we are confident that the Board of Park Commissioners and the Common Council would not approve such a use that would otherwise be permitted in C2-Commercial.

Additionally, the large parking area located immediately to the east of this facility is rarely at full capacity and able to accommodate parking for this facility. This lot has 89 parking spaces. Building codes will only permit less than 100 people within the building, and this number may be less once the interior is built out.

Any of the other concerns by the residents, such as hours of operation, conduct of guests, type of food and drink to serve, alcohol use, parking requirements, impacts to the park and the adjacent gardens, length of lease, and any other similar details should be reviewed, managed, and evaluated as part of their lease agreement with the City and not as part of the rezoning petition.

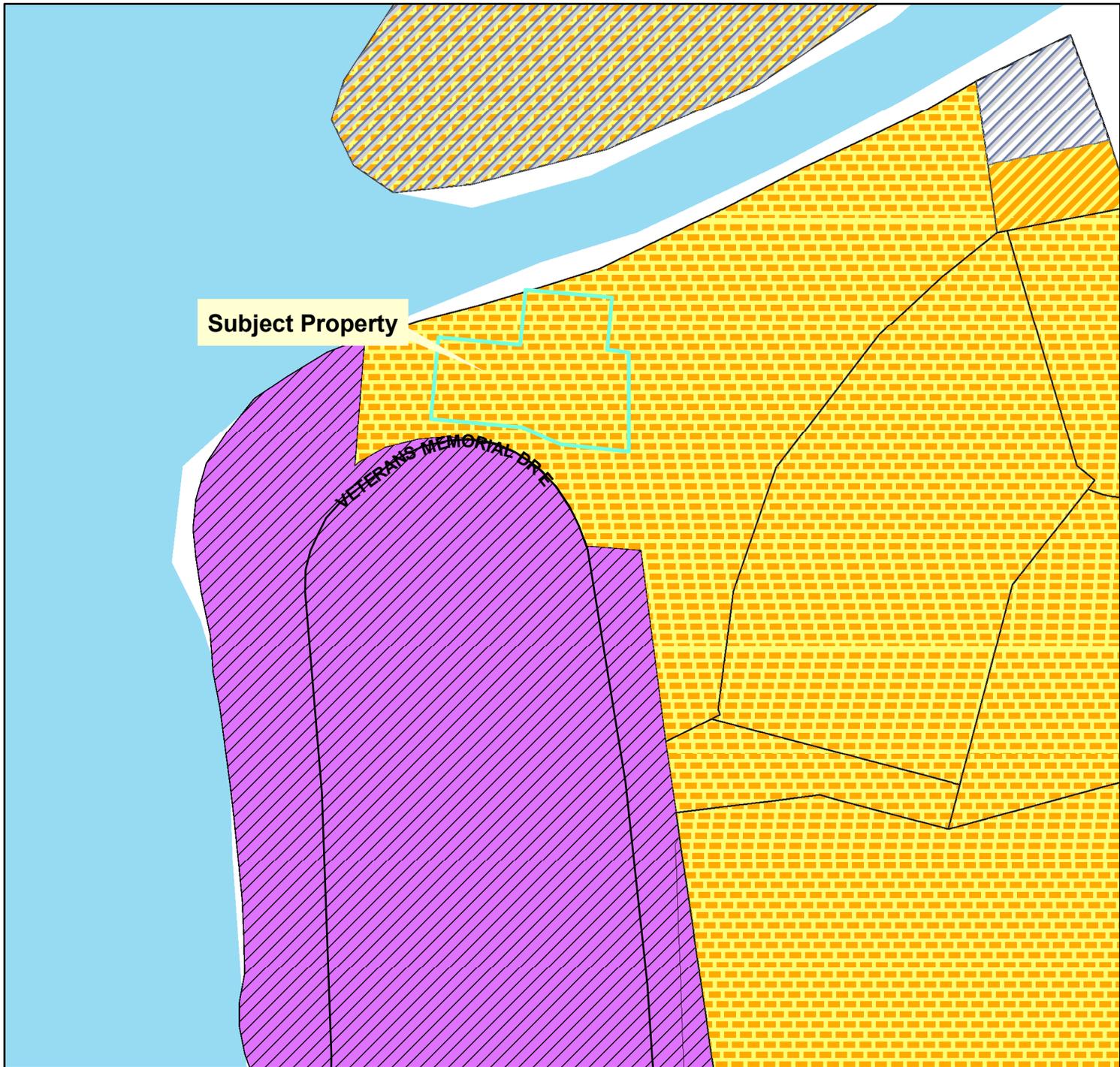
As municipalities are looking for other ways to generate revenue, this proposal allows for the City to do that as well as restore a historic building. **This item is recommended for approval.**



# BASIC ZONING DISTRICTS

- R1 - SINGLE FAMILY
- R2 - RESIDENCE
- WR - WASHBURN RES
- R3 - SPECIAL RESIDENCE
- R4 - LOW DENSITY MULTI
- R5 - MULTIPLE DWELLING
- R6 - SPECIAL MULTIPLE
- PD- PLANNED DEVELOP
- TND - TRAD NEIGH DEV.
- C1 - LOCAL BUSINESS
- C2 - COMMERCIAL
- C3 - COMMUNITY BUSINESS
- M1 - LIGHT INDUSTRIAL
- M2 - HEAVY INDUSTRIAL
- PS - PUBLIC & SEMI-PUBLIC
- PL - PARKING LOT
- UT - PUBLIC UTILITY
- CON - CONSERVANCY
- FW - FLOODWAY
- A1 - AGRICULTURAL
- EA - EXCLUSIVE AG
- City Limits
- SUBJECT PROPERTY





Subject Property

VETERANS MEMORIAL DR

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