

Why I Don't Agree With The Conversion of The "Old Fish Lab" To a Limited Use Commercial Venue

As a little back ground, I moved to La Crosse in 1970 when the "Old Fish Lab Building" in Riverside Park actually was "The Fish Lab", before the USGS campus was built on French Island. It was eventually converted to its use as a visitor center and museum, and continued to serve as a useful amenity in Riverside Park, serving visitors and locals alike in its advantageous location.

Separate from that building, but still related to the overall amenities of our premier Front Door Park, someone" decided Riverside Park needed a food vendor (a good idea in concept) and there "suddenly" appeared a hamburger stand in a "semi-permanent" trailer at the south end of the north road into the park. I will acknowledge I, and many others, enjoyed and made use of that amenity. There were some grumblings about its "make-shift-temporary" appearance, and eventually the somewhat vague permit status and legality in a public park on a "no-bid" basis caused it to go away.

I have misgivings about converting the now empty building (the first part of The Plan has already been carried out without opportunity for public input) into a rentable "private event" venue. I realize the Park Department rents its shelters to private events. But 1) many of those events are actually "non-profit" community events and the general public is welcome to join in, or 2) the general public is not greatly restricted in its enjoyment of the rest of the park because in many cases the shelter is not the main feature of the park or it is not in a park apt to be frequented by out-of-town or out-of-country guests, 3) outdoor picnic shelters for large events are not a common amenity provided by private vendors (yes I know there are event farms...but usually for huge events...not a typical wedding party).

There are plenty of privately owned banquet halls, taverns, churches, former church buildings, old Pump Houses, restaurants, and bowling alleys that can provide indoor venues for weddings, family gatherings and other such events. Does the City really need to convert a publically accessible building, that seemed to be serving a useful public purpose, to yet another private rental venue.

Imagine the disappointment to a proud La Crosse citizen, bringing their first-time, out-of-town guests to the International Friendship Gardens, only to find there is no access due to a private party rental!

What use will The Old Lab Building serve the the days it is not rented (most of the time)? How will that use be carried out if it is rented to a private function?

Thank you for reading my views

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