

Elsen, Nikki

From: Laura Godden <lgodden@uwlax.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, April 6, 2021 9:08 PM
To: Elsen, Nikki; ZZ Council Members
Subject: OBJECTION to File #: 21-0337 CUP - 906 Gillette Street (Fire Station)

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April 6, 2021

Dear La Crosse City Council members and City Clerk,

My name is Laura Godden, and I live at 1319 20th St. S., La Crosse, WI, 54601. I am writing today to adamantly object to the issuance of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to demolish Fire Station No. 4 at 906 Gillette Street. While I feel like a new north side station is warranted, I also strongly think that there is no need or advantage to demolishing the old building. It is clear to me that this doesn't have to be a choice between having a new station and saving a piece of the city's cultural heritage because it is reasonably feasible to do both.

Since the fire chief himself has publicly stated that the old station must remain mostly intact and completely functional while the new one is built to ensure that the north side doesn't go without nearby fire protection during construction, I do not understand why the preferred choice defaulted to tearing down the old structure after the new one is finished. Why wouldn't the city always first prioritize reusing historic buildings before electing to destroy significant pieces of its historic integrity? Doing so would save taxpayers thousands of dollars in demolition costs, benefit the environment by reducing the amount of building waste going into our landfills, generate additional annual property tax revenue, repurpose high-quality buildings with irreplaceable craftsmanship, and preserve vital pieces of our city's history and character, which provides benefits for the economy and tourism.

Even though the old station may no longer conform to current firefighting practices and standards, it still has value to the community. It could be used for a variety of other purposes and enjoyed for many more generations to come. I personally think that it would make a great community space, housing unit, or daycare. Most young children would be thrilled to spend their day at a former fire station with its own brass pole! A recent Wisconsin Historical Society evaluation deemed that Fire Station No. 4 extensively meets the eligibility requirements for both the State and National Register of Historic Places and thus also the tax credits for restoration that go along with them. There are already at least two other buildings by J. Mandor Matson, the Racine-based architect that designed this station for our community, on the National Register of Historic Places, showing that his work has already been proven to be significant.

If the city no longer wants this property, why wasn't it put up for redevelopment like the former Fire Station No. 5 (south side senior center) on Denton Street. Quite honestly, the details surrounding this project seem strangely haphazard, uninspired, and a bit lazy, from only finding a suitable site a handful of months ago (after searching the entire north side and ending back up at the same exact location) to the unceremonious and perfunctory first release of proposed drawings to the public only a few weeks ago. For a building that has been pinned after for so long, these actions come off as cursory and shockingly shortsighted. I would have thought

that from the very beginning, the historic station would have been slated for reuse, much like how the old Roosevelt was repurposed when the new North Side Elementary was built.

Overall, I find the lack of community input on this matter troublesome. Only a few short weeks ago, when I was out taking photos of the houses scheduled to be torn down for the new station, several neighbors stopped to ask me what I was doing. It was disconcerting that people living right across the street had no idea what the plans for the area were. When I told them, it was clear that they found the station to be an integral part of the neighborhood's character and history, and no one was happy about its pending destruction. The discordant way in which this matter has unfolded should serve as a lesson for future projects. Good and transparent government should actively seek out community input throughout the process, so it can best serve the needs and wishes of its constituents, especially before doing anything irreversible with such a prominent and consequential structure. When more ideas are considered, often the best and most fiscally prudent means and solutions are found. Why weren't publicly promoted listening sessions held for this building like those recently done to help plan the future of the public library or those held for the Riverside North area? It doesn't seem like too much to ask for, considering that we haven't gotten a new fire station since 1967!

I genuinely have heard no convincing reason as to why Fire Station No. 4 couldn't reside harmoniously next to a newly built station, serving a new purpose for our community's future. Thank you so much for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about anything I wrote, please feel free to contact me.

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