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To: ZZ Council Members; washingtonveys@cityoflacrosse.org
Subject: Operating Budget and Parks

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Dear Mayor Washington-Spivey and City Council Members,

I am writing with deep concern about two recent decisions: the proposed elimination of Arts Board funding and the indefinite closure of two of our city's parks.

I am a life-long resident of La Crosse. Despite already holding degrees in Physics and Latin American Studies, I recently returned to higher education to pursue a degree from Western Technical College in Graphic Design—my passion and my future. Over the past year, my partner and I have taken a major step by incorporating our studio, investing in equipment, and committing to a downtown rental space. We made this investment because La Crosse has shown itself to be a place where the arts can thrive: the Rivoli Arts District, Arts Board grants, and the culture fostered by places like the Pump House, River City Arts, Root Note, and Grounded. These resources don't just enrich the daily lives of community members—they make it possible for artists like me to build a career here and for small businesses to root themselves in this community.

The Arts Board has been instrumental in fostering the growth of our creative community, funding public works that strengthen our cultural identity, drawing in visitors, and supporting local commerce. Cutting this funding now would stall the momentum we have built and weaken one of our strongest tools for economic and community vitality.

Similarly, while I understand the safety and management concerns that informed the decision to close the parks, leaving these spaces fenced and inactive deprives families and neighborhoods of valuable public amenities. Moreover, closing parks without fully engaging with service providers and organizations dedicated to supporting the unhoused population shifts challenges into other areas rather than addressing them, as has been the case throughout my 30 years in La Crosse. Please, take a different path. Collaborative approaches—grounded in partnerships with local nonprofits, housing programs, and public health services—are more likely to yield sustainable outcomes that balance public safety, access, and compassion.

Both the arts funding and the parks issue speak to a larger question of how we invest in our city's long-term well-being, our community. Decisions that restrict access to cultural and communal resources risk eroding the very strengths that have made our city vibrant and appealing to residents and visitors alike. Do we move toward solutions that uplift, connect, and sustain us, or do we retreat into short-term fixes that leave lasting gaps?

I urge you to reconsider both the proposed Arts Board funding cut and the indefinite park closures. Please work with existing community partners and seek creative, constructive solutions that strengthen our city instead of diminishing it.

Thank you for your service and your attention to these matters.

Avery Van Gaard