

Craig, Sondra

From: Jay Thompson <jet10772@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, August 3, 2024 11:39 AM
To: ZZ Council Members; Woodard, Chris; Kristine Olson
Subject: Houska Park Item 24-1075

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item 24-1075

I am deeply disturbed and disappointed upon hearing about, once again allowing the unsheltered population to camp at Houska Park. This is an ongoing issue for the entire community but directly to my family and property.

I own a boathouse on the other side of the bike trail from Houska Park (H15). This has been in my family for 4 generations and means a great deal to me and my family. I now proudly have an infant daughter that I don't want to be in fear for or put in danger at any time.

I was thrilled to see the bank drive beautifully paved a few years ago. I truly hoped to see more resources spent on developing the park, possibly new playground equipment or pickleball courts to complement the dog park, bike trail and river view. Instead it became a chain linked fence of debauchery. I have a pit in the bottom of my stomach thinking about sacrificing this beautiful property on an unruly, disrespectful, and unlawful "unhoused population". This to me is actually disrespectful to the river culture the La Crosse area claims to take pride in. There has to be another answer besides destroying one of our parks. There are so many abandoned buildings throughout the city and neighboring areas. There has to be another place to allow "camping".

Having the homeless be placed or allowed to be at Houska Park is not the answer for avoiding an eyesore in more populous areas such as downtown or Cameron Park. This is not allowing for the public to use the park and as far as the boathouse owners this is a direct threat of damage and theft of personal property. Every boathouse on that stretch was broken into multiple times when the homeless population was placed in Houska Park. There are multiple police reports documenting this. During the duration of the homeless tent city tenancy, our boathouse was broken into. This particular attack hit particularly close to home because it involved sentimental physical property. The police were called and a report was filed. The window was smashed and the boathouse had been invaded and ransacked. Every drawer was pulled out, dumped and pawed through. Everything was essentially upside down. This is first and foremost a complete invasion of privacy, but there were multiple items missing including a TV, DVD player etc, but there was one thing missing that was immediately noted. My late son's tackle box. This was not an item worth much, but memories of the time we had before he passed away. The police were able to recover this tackle box. It was found in one of the homeless camper's tents. There is no reasonable doubt of its owner, as his fishing license remained tucked into the box.

The real point of that story was that nothing was ever done about it. They couldn't assign blame or arrest anyone concerning the theft because all campers denied any involvement. The tackle box was found next to our BED pillows, cooler, and other items also stolen.

The real issue is that once the homeless are placed in Houska park, or anywhere for that matter, they do not simply go away. For the city or for the residents. This will continue to eat up resources that will do nothing

to solve a long term problem. The city will have to pile money into keeping them there but also to at some point rebuild the park once again.

Along with property damage, there is real fear from the people regarding violence and mental instability.

There is also a call and visit from the police regarding a "camper" masturbating openly on a boulder alongside the bike trail with his pants completely removed. The officer stated that the man was mentally ill and was simply told to put his clothes back on and continue with his day. If men such as this are mere feet from where I am sleeping with my 8 month old daughter that is scary and I do consider this unsafe for Any member of the public. This is only one example of offensive and illegal behavior that was tolerated by the homeless last time. This same summer there was an entire police and K9 team searching for a man on the loose with actual swords. Ninja swords.

The city funded food delivery as well as dumpsters, portable bathrooms, water, food delivery and tents or shelter. This cost the city a great deal of resources that were often abused and taken for granted. There were multiple dumpster and port a potty fires at Houska Park that year. Along with disgusting trash of food delivery containers from this service , I cannot even count the number of needles, balloons etc that were discarded in all areas in and around Houska Park.

Houska Park was more or less deemed unusable and fenced off since the unsheltered were placed there.

This is a plea to please reconsider allowing camping at Houska Park to allow it to again be a usable part of the community.

I pay a great deal in park fees, taxes and for upkeep on my boathouse and the bank as well. I would like to be able to enjoy my summer boathouse without fear. I would also like to know that it is well protected when I am not there.

La Crosse has been known to cherish long standing tradition and appreciation of life on the river. Please respect our piece of history and the safety of the community.

Feel free to reach out with any questions or further testimony.

Jay 608-792-8530
Kristine 608-797-2267

Thank you,

Jason E. Thompson
Kristine C. Olson