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Sent: Tuesday, May 6, 2025 2:11 PM
To: ZZ Council Members
Cc: Washington-Spivey, Shaundel; Schadeberg, Kristen
Subject: Comments: Proposal to create a City Administrator (or similar) position for the City of La Crosse, WI

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Good Afternoon Members of the Common Council –

My name is Bob Gollnik, Executive Director of the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC), and a transportation planner/project manager with over 20 years of experience working across the United States. Our agency focuses on regional transportation planning for the La Crosse-La Crescent area, with the City of La Crosse as our largest member. In some ways we serve as a de facto “Council of Governments” for the communities surrounding the City of La Crosse. Our policy board consists of the highest elected officials from 10 area member communities and the La Crosse County Board Chair. We also have two committees that involve multiple City of La Crosse technical staff.

Last fall, I shared a version of the information below, and I believe this issue remains just as important as you consider the next steps for the City Administrator, City Manager, or Chief of Staff role. Since becoming Executive Director of the LAPC in 2023, I had the privilege of working with Mayor Reynolds, who was an excellent partner and supported many productive conversations that advanced our regional planning work. In recent months, his leadership underscored the value of having a professional city management structure in place—regardless of who is in office. I look forward to building a similar partnership with Mayor Washington-Spivey, and I believe the need for this role is more urgent than ever. A City Administrator, City Manager, or Chief of Staff could help La Crosse meet future demands, improve service delivery, and boost coordination and effectiveness across departments.

Cities of La Crosse’s size—and even smaller municipalities—commonly have this role to ensure consistent, effective governance. While many points have been outlined for the council, I would like to emphasize a few key areas most relevant to our work and the benefits a City Administrator/City Manager/Chief of Staff could bring to La Crosse’s growth and development:

- **Experienced Professional Leadership and Stability:** The right city administrator will bring professional experience to help La Crosse grow in a smart and sustainable way—especially when balancing natural resources like the Mississippi River with development. They also provide consistency across departments and outside partnerships, even when elected officials change.
- **Smart and Efficient Use of Resources:** Administrators are tasked with making the most of public funds. La Crosse could benefit from someone who can manage tax dollars, grants, budgets, and resources wisely—especially for projects like infrastructure, housing, and public safety.
- **Follow-Through on Plans:** La Crosse has a history of big goals, like improving the riverfront and expanding transit. A city administrator could help make sure these plans move forward efficiently and stay on track with the city’s long-term vision.

- **Managing Daily Operations:** Running a city like La Crosse—with its transportation and public safety needs, housing issues, and busy tourism scene—requires full-time attention. A city administrator would handle daily operations *so the mayor and council can focus on big-picture policy, long-term vision, and engaging with the community.*
- **Planning for the Future:** Ideally, a city administrator will help La Crosse grow thoughtfully—supporting economic development, affordable housing, environmental goals, tourism, and quality of life for residents.
- **Non-Partisan Leadership:** Effective city administrators work well across political lines. Their focus is on what’s best for the community, not politics. They also help new mayors and council members get up to speed, which keeps city work moving smoothly.
- **Helping the Council Do Its Job:** With a city administrator handling budgets, staff, and operations, the city council can focus on making laws, listening to residents, and setting priorities.
- **Handling Emergencies and Crisis Management:** Whether it’s flooding, economic challenges, or major community events, city administrators are great at leading quick, organized responses, leadership helps keep people and businesses safe.
- **Connecting with the Community:** Administrators in other places have helped strengthen the connection between city government and the people it serves. La Crosse could benefit from someone who ensures community voices are heard and used to guide decisions.
- **Improved Accountability:** Because city administrators answer to the council and public, they help ensure city departments meet goals and operate transparently. This builds trust and keeps city services on track.

I believe the role of a City Administrator (or a variety of) would significantly enhance La Crosse’s governance, providing stability and professional management to address the city’s current and future needs while expanding collaborative opportunities with regional partners like us.

Please contact me if any of you would like to discuss further, and I strongly encourage you to consider this important initiative sooner than later.

Sincerely,

Bob Gollnik

Bob Gollnik

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