



City of La Crosse

July 8, 2024

To Members of the Common Council of the City of La Crosse,

This document has been prepared in response to resolution #24-0817 passed by the Common Council on June 17, 2024, directing all necessary staff to provide multiple options for interim overnight shelter in writing within three weeks of the adoption of the Resolution.

This conceptual document is meant to fulfill the requirements of the resolution. According to the Pathways to Housing list, which is a by-name list of people experiencing homelessness in the City of La Crosse, there are approximately 230 individuals living in the La Crosse community without permanent and secure housing. There are approximately 70 individuals staying in local fully occupied shelters (Salvation Army and New Horizons). Therefore, it has been determined that an option or combination of options for the remaining 160 individuals would be needed to provide adequate shelter or secure living option. The options provided in this document seek to address the needs of the aforementioned 160 individuals in a viable manner; something that is likely to be achievable. If, for example, property owner is not willing to allow a parcel to be used for this purpose or require approvals that seem highly unlikely or unattainable that option is not included for the purposes of this document.

Work was conducted within the limited timeline allocated by #24-0817 to comprehensively assess space and location options that have been considered repeatedly in the past few years. All potential options were considered and evaluated within a viability matrix that included discussions of access of emergency service personnel, available infrastructure to address hygienic needs, cost of needed improvements, and whether a parcel was likely to be readily available for use, among other considerations.

Based on lessons learned from past experiences providing a space or shelter, considering the number of individuals for which an appropriate space would need to be provided, and through evaluation of current space availability, a mixture of indoor and outdoor spaces is likely

necessary to effectively provide services for the current population of individuals experiencing homelessness. Among the considerations of this determination is the sheer number of individuals needing services, the likelihood many individuals would be unwilling to stay at an indoors facility because, among other reasons, the lack of pet access, and other considerations that can be numerous and unique to individuals. Location decisions also need to consider access for those with disabilities, availability of electrical infrastructure to accommodate storage of medication for certain individuals as well as whether locations would need to zoning changes to allow the intended use.

Among the most significant considerations for any location is the level of staffing necessary to ensure health, safety, and environmental stability. Based on significant past experiences, it was determined that adequate staffing should be prioritized for both indoor and outdoor locations. Appropriate training and qualifications are critical of any staff who are to work with individuals identified by this council resolution. Potential staff additions include, but are not limited to, maintenance, security, and supportive care workers. Volunteers can be included to assist in staffing needs but would need proper coordination and should not be considered as additional personnel in lieu of appropriate professional staff due to liability and safety considerations.

Possible locations both within the City of La Crosse and nearby municipalities.

After a vetting process of parcels identifiable as potential sites, the most currently viable have been identified. In addition to sites evaluated within La Crosse city limits, conversations to identify potential sites outside of the city occurred with representatives from the Village of Holmen, City of Onalaska, Village of West Salem, Village of Bangor, Town of Onalaska, City of La Crescent, La Crosse County, Sparta, City of Tomah, Town of Shelby, Town of Medary, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Department of Administration and the School District of La Crosse. A message was left with the Town of Campbell, but staff were unable to connect with a representative there. No immediate or unique options were provided although representatives from some municipalities seemed open to further discussion, pending governing body approval and provision of additional information for use of open space.

Regardless of the location, additional staff would be required to operate any facility properly and safely. Additionally, any Park property would need approval from the City of La Crosse Board of Park Commissioners.

Potential sites

Indoor

1. Catholic Charities Warming Center at 413 3rd Street South. Capacity for approximately 40 people.
2. Fire station #10 (former fire station #2) at 626 Monitor Street. 2 toilets, 1 shower, kitchen. Capacity for approximately 30 people.
3. Northside Policing Center at 713 St. James St. Capacity for approximately 20 people. 1 shower, 2 kitchenettes, separate men's and women's bathrooms.
4. 621 3rd St N. Capacity for approximately 30 people. 1 toilet. No shower.
5. Norwood Inn and Suites – 148 hotel rooms, 101 Sky Harbour Drive, located in the Town of Campbell. There may be additional unknown costs associated with needed repairs.

Outdoor

1. Wittenberg Park. 2945 Wittenberg Place. This property was declared surplus on May 9, 2019, and therefore may not need approval from the Board of Park Commissioners. 8.6-acre parcel with bathroom facilities.
2. 300 St. Cloud St. 0.93 acre. No on-premises amenities.



- Green space by City Hall parking lot between 6th and 7th Street. This property is on the list of properties where camping is prohibited. No on-premises overnight or weekend amenities.



- County parking lot at 230 7th St N, tax parcel 17-20167-60, Lot F. Recommendation of using this as a safe parking place for those living in their vehicles. This lot would be accessible from 7:00pm – 7:00am. There are similar initiatives in Duluth, MN (<https://steppingonupduluth.org/safe-bay>) and Brown County/Green Bay, WI (<https://bchhcwi.org/safe-park/>). This proposal has not been discussed with the County and would be subject to approval of the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors.
- Sherwood Park at 3300 Nottingham Place. No on-premises amenities.
- Erickson Park at 2423 21st Place S. 9.14 acres. Shower and bathroom facilities at nearby Erickson Pool.
- City-owned property at 5248 33rd St S. 1.17 acres.



Projected expenditures related to staff, equipment, security, rental fees, insurance, cleaning costs and any other associated expenses.

Providing dedicated spaces for individuals experiencing homelessness, whether indoors or outdoors, involves various cost factors. These factors can be divided into known and unknown costs, impacting the overall budget required to sustain such initiatives. Costs are estimated based on past experiences, expenses, and rough estimates but not through a formal Request for Proposal process.

Known costs

1. Operational Costs

- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse Inc. La Crosse Warming Center: Operates from November to April with a monthly expense of approximately \$50,000. If operational outside these months, the cost remains the same.

- The Salvation Army Services: Annual costs range between \$125,000 and \$150,000 for 20 hours of work per week for six employees. This does not include additional expenses like furnishings, utilities, facilities repair, and janitorial supplies. Their facility is currently at full capacity.

2. Staffing Costs

- City Staff for Outdoor Locations: Estimated at \$400 per week for each staff member, with a minimum of two staff members for 20 hours per week per person. This would result in an annual cost of \$41,600. City Staff would be responsible for daytime cleaning and maintenance of the site and not for security or to provide other services.

3. Security Services

- Estimate of security services ranges from \$1500 - \$2000 per day. This results in an annual cost of \$547,500 - \$730,000. This estimate is from previous costs associated with emergency shelter.

4. Potential Additional Location Amenities

- Portable Toilets: \$80 each per week, serviced 2-3 times per week, or \$105 for ADA accessible units which results in an annual cost of \$9,620 (for two toilets with one of them an ADA unit).

- Dumpsters: \$500 each per month, emptied three times a week which results in an annual cost of \$6,000.

- ADA 4 Station Portable Shower / Restroom Combo Trailer: \$105,760 to purchase (cost from 2021).

5. Infrastructure Costs

- Electricity Infrastructure for Outdoor Spaces: Estimated at \$10,000 if it does not already exist.
- Repairs for bathroom and shower facilities at Erickson Pool: Estimated at \$20,000.

6. Additional Items to Be Considered

- Storage of personal items during the day.
- Supplies such as chairs and cots.

Unknown Costs

Hidden and Unknown Costs of Establishing Homeless Shelters and Encampments

1. Location-Based Variability

Utility Rates: The cost of utilities such as electricity, water, and heating can vary significantly based on the location of the shelter.

Labor Costs: The availability and cost of skilled labor for maintenance, security, and support services can fluctuate. Ensuring that staff members are adequately trained to deal with the specific needs of homeless individuals, including mental health support and substance abuse counseling, can further increase labor costs.

2. Unidentified Needs and Emergencies

Unexpected Repairs and Maintenance: Facilities may require sudden repairs or upgrades due to wear and tear or unforeseen damages. For example, during extreme weather conditions,

shelters may need additional repairs to roofs or heating systems. The unpredictability of such emergencies may necessitate the allocation of contingency funds.

Increased Demand: Sudden spikes in homelessness can occur which could stress facilities and available resources.

Health Emergencies: Outbreaks of illnesses within shelters can lead to additional healthcare costs and the need for isolation facilities. Managing these health emergencies requires not only medical supplies and healthcare staff but also infrastructure adjustments to create quarantine areas, all of which contribute to unforeseen expenses.

3. Regulatory and Compliance Costs

Local Regulations: Meeting local building codes, health and safety standards, and obtaining necessary permits can incur costs. Compliance with Wisconsin's health and safety regulations for shelters might require additional investments in facility upgrades and regular inspections to ensure ongoing compliance.

Legal Fees: Potential legal challenges or opposition from local residents can lead to protracted legal battles, further increasing costs and delaying project timelines.

4. Community Impact and Interaction

Security Measures: Ensuring the safety of both the shelter residents and the surrounding community can necessitate hiring security personnel and installing surveillance systems.

Community Outreach Programs: Engaging the local community through outreach programs to reduce stigma and build support for the shelters can require significant funding. La Crosse has invested in community meetings, educational campaigns, and collaborative efforts with local organizations to foster a supportive environment for its homeless population. These initiatives help to create a more inclusive community but also require continuous investment.

5. Long-Term Sustainability

Fundraising: Continuous efforts to secure funding through grants, donations, and government assistance are necessary to maintain operations. La Crosse has relied on both state and federal grants—including ARPA dollars, as well as local fundraising campaigns, to support programs related to addressing homelessness. Sustained fundraising efforts are critical to ensure the long-term viability of shelters and to cover unexpected costs.

Partnerships: Developing and maintaining partnerships with local businesses, non-profits, healthcare providers, and educational institutions can be resource-intensive but crucial for sustainability. Partnerships with organizations like the La Crosse Community Foundation and local healthcare providers have been vital in providing comprehensive support to the homeless population. These partnerships require coordination, communication, and sometimes shared funding.

Volunteer Management: Recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers require dedicated resources. La Crosse's shelters depend heavily on volunteers, necessitating ongoing training programs, volunteer coordination efforts, and recognition events to maintain a motivated and effective volunteer workforce. This will also be true for any effort undertaken through city government. The reliance on volunteers adds an element of unpredictability, as volunteer availability can fluctuate.

Estimate of Known Operations Costs (per annum) for potential indoor/outdoor sites:

Indoor:

1. Catholic Charities Warming Center at 413 3rd Street South. Capacity for approximately 40 people. Approximately \$300,000.
2. Fire station #10 (former fire station #2) at 626 Monitor Street. 2 toilets, 1 shower, kitchen. Capacity for approximately 30 people. Approximately \$190,000 - \$250,000.
3. Northside Policing Center at 713 St. James St. Capacity for approximately 20 people. Approximately \$190,000 - \$250,000.
4. 621 3rd St N. Capacity for approximately 30 people. Approximately \$190,000 - \$250,000.
5. Norwood Inn and Suites – 148 hotel rooms, 101 Sky Harbour Drive, located in the Town of Campbell. Approximately \$2,190,000 - \$2,550,000 (includes purchase of \$2,000,000, not an annual operations cost).

Outdoor:

1. Wittenberg Park. 2945 Wittenberg Place. Approximately \$609,100 - \$800,000
2. 300 St. Cloud St. 0.93 acre. Approximately \$609,100 - \$800,000
3. Green space by City Hall parking lot between 6th and 7th Street. Approximately \$609,100 - \$800,000
4. County parking lot at 230 7th St N, tax parcel 17-20167-60, Lot F. Unknown administrative costs.

5. Sherwood Park at 3300 Nottingham Place. Approximately \$609,100 - \$800,000
6. Erickson Park at 2423 21st Place S. 9.14 acres. Approximately \$609,100 - \$800,000
7. City-owned property at 5248 33rd St S. 1.17 acres. Approximately \$609,100 - \$800,000

Estimated start date and duration of program.

Factors for the estimated start date of a program would depend on choosing a location and funding, hiring of staff and signing contracts with service providers. Any such program would need to continue until sufficient, sustainable surge shelter and/or housing is identified through the Pathways Housing list. In some capacity, estimates would need to be considered until the end of 2028. The temporary surge shelter timeline as identified in Pathways Home is April 2025.

Program details and rules, including, among other things, hours of operation, check-in procedures, code of conduct.

Since this request is for overnight interim shelter, the hours of 7:00pm – 7:00am are generally assumed.

1. Salvation Army

Currently operates as the primary shelter in La Crosse at one location. Emergency shelter program rules can be modified for new locations that address the following related to rules of conduct at current Salvation Army shelter: Length of stay, visitors, language/aggression, weapons, theft, curfew, tobacco, drugs/alcohol, medications, dress code, sign in/out, pets, et al.

2. Catholic Charities Warming Center

Benevolent organization that is open as an overnight rest spot from November – April. Opening the center year-round would require additional funding. Catholic Charities has their own set of policies and procedures that are generally known by individuals who are unsheltered and use the facility.

3. Outdoor space. Operational hours and protocol may depend on outcome of resolution #24-0876 and requirement to move every 12 hours when camping outdoors. Otherwise, basic rules of conduct will be observed at all times and intended focus is to provide an area to sleep overnight rather than create a long-term outdoor living environment.

Proposals on how to deal with secondary effects of homeless persons once transitioned to interim shelter. For example, when homeless persons leave their location and garbage, abandoned property, and hazardous or infectious materials are left behind.

From past experiences of encampment clean up at Cameron Park, Houska Park, Isle la Plume and River Point District, contractors and staff clean sites with heavy machinery and hand-pick to clear out small items such as plastic detritus and needles. Once interim shelter is established, the same process would need to be achieved at any current encampments. Staff would request assistance from refuse companies as well as add help to assist in cleanup.

Estimated cost of clean-up is between \$10,000 - \$30,000 per site. This estimate is from previous costs associated clean-up efforts and depends greatly on size, location, and number of individuals in an established encampment.