

Elsen, Nikki

From: Elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org
Subject: FW: homeless

From: Reynolds, Mitch <reynoldsm@cityoflacrosse.org>
Sent: Tuesday, April 2, 2024 7:41 AM
To: Dave Skoloda <daveskoloda@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: homeless

Dave and Gretchen,

Thank you for contacting me with your concerns. I understand your frustrations with the movement of the activities with some of the unsheltered individuals. I also agree that this issue is an immense burden for our community.

As you may have heard, city and county government have been working together on a long term plan to address homelessness in our community through the [Pathways Home plan](#). Implementation of this plan began in January. One of the key aspects of this plan is to permanently end encampments of any size. As you mention, the marsh area is not suitable for camping. There are no areas in the city suitable for camping. There are, however, steps the city and county need to achieve before the encampment ban can be completely enforced. In the meantime, city staff continue to monitor and interact daily with unsheltered individuals as a means towards moving them towards any available treatment and housing options. Just as soon as it is possible, the encampments will end. There will be no wavering from that commitment.

In relation to your question about shelter spaces, those simply do not exist in this community beyond what is available at the Salvation Army and that site remains at capacity. In addition, city government has neither adequate physical space nor the personnel resources to provide government-operated services to the vast number of individuals that are currently unsheltered.

Finally, it is somewhat disappointing that you see the response to homelessness by the city—or me—as a "shrug." This is, in fact, the very first time the city has addressed the issue in this community in any meaningful way. This is the very first time that the county has been engaged to help find a sustainable path forward. This issue is one our Neighborhood Resource Officers, homeless services coordinator, fire personnel, parks, and library staff commit many hours to on a daily basis. The city and county have committed to an intense effort to find a sustainable solution to homelessness in our community, an effort that is, frankly, historic in scope and scale. Unfortunately, the crisis of homelessness here and elsewhere has also reached critical levels and it will take time and effort to accomplish the changes we need to see.

Thank you again for contacting me and feel free to do so at anytime in the future.

Sincerely,

m.

Mitch Reynolds

Mayor

City of La Crosse

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From: Dave Skoloda <daveskoloda@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 1, 2024 4:52 PM
To: Reynolds, Mitch <reynoldsm@cityoflacrosse.org>
Subject: homeless

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Dear Mayor Reynolds:

Mitch Moths, president of our condo association, the Landings, sent letters to you and other officials last week about the issues associated with homeless camping that has moved to our area after being evicted from the area along the Black. He has had no response as of Monday afternoon. Unlike the camps on the Black and at Houska Park the year before, this relocation is to an area totally unsuited for camping — an area with fire risk, without access to sanitary facilities and causing public nuisance including disruption of wildlife, noise and trash, concerns about drug use and disruption of important commuter and walking routes that are heavily used. One resident here called 911 after observing a drug sale and loud shouting and screams from the trail in the middle of the night are disruptive as well. Another of our residents said she observed a camper relieving himself outdoors in sight of her river-facing condo unit. She moved to downtown La Crosse recently — a move she and others may regret if the city can't deal with these disruptive and disturbing issues. The inconsistency of the city's policy is striking: we have closed the parks to camping, but the bike trails are just as much public parks in terms of their use and function in getting people out of doors.

This situation isn't acceptable for the homeless and it isn't acceptable for the residents downtown either. Your message when the eviction took place recently was a shrug: "Due to the lack of shelter space and a multitude of other challenges related to chronic homelessness in our community, individuals who camp in various areas of the city have few other viable options and so will likely continue to find places to try and exist outdoors." This from the mayor who said he wouldn't rest until the problems are solved. You issued an emergency declaration two years ago. It's time for another. Call in the National Guard if the city doesn't have the resources to deal with this. Get help from Fort McCoy with its expertise in dealing with refugees (13,000 Afghans at one time). Open city buildings for shelter. Stop this takeover of our public spaces. The homeless lack "viable options" because none has been offered. We recognize the complexity of the issue, but this is not the time to accept the status quo with a shrug.

Sincerely,

Dave and Gretchen Skoloda

14 Copeland Ave #213

La Crosse

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