



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

400 LA CROSSE STREET | LA CROSSE, WI 54601 | P: (608) 789-7512 | F: (608) 789-7318

Memorandum

To: Community Development Committee
From: Caroline Gregerson
Date: October 13, 2020
Re: **Community Needs Assessment**

The City of La Crosse has been informed it's received its third round of CDBG CARES Act funding, \$283,394. In addition, it was informed by the State of Wisconsin that it is eligible to apply for a second round of funds given to the State, for \$220,567.97. (The County will also be eligible to apply for funds in non-City areas of the state).

I have been conducting an informal needs assessment through listening sessions and attending the WEDA conference.

The Economy

The travel, entertainment, restaurants, and arts are the most significantly impacted. Manufacturing, health doing ok. Consumers will not be comfortable making purchases into this industry until we can slow the spread of the Coronavirus. Brian Fukuda, with La Crosse County, has informally requested consideration for participation in a "Business Resiliency Fund" at \$50,000. This fund would aim to support businesses to continue to be successful during Covid-19 (versus short-term operating capital). A Buy Local pledge initiative is being sponsored.

Current needs of business community, based on stakeholder meetings conducted today:

- Need hope and an end point, people are living with a lot of fear, any business that is people-oriented is challenged right now (Roush)
- Need to restore confidence, positive messaging, no amount of money is going to address the cash flow needs of businesses (Roush)
- Infrastructure (Hlavacka)
- More placemaking this winter which is not possible without snow removal to make it safe to walk (Lash-Stangel)
- People don't feel safe downtown due to the large numbers of homeless individuals (Lash-Stangel), barricades from La Crosse Center permanent, heaters/fires/winter wonderland (Lash-Stangel)
- Funds to cover the cost of rent/mortgage (Emslie)
- To restore confidence and employment, school has to be back in session and have child care (Seeger)
- Digital marketing and digital advertising support (Seeger)
- Winter is going to make things worse

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Programs being considered or launched

- Buy local pledge campaign
- PR campaign “Get on Living” (Northside Businesses)
- Couleecap, UWL Business Assistance, WWBIC all trying to help businesses connect the dots to funding
- WWBIC & SBDC offering training for online/social media marketing
- WWBIC offering lots of online classes
- Shop Small Local online catalog - Chamber gift basket

Child Care

Despite the funding (which has definitely helped), child care centers continue to struggle. One center just lost their director and 4K teacher and also have 6 open positions. Staffing levels are so low, centers and classrooms are closing. No one is applying for positions and directors are stressed. Staff are burning out due to long hours and fear of exposure. Families are stressed and not always supportive of closures. Currently there is little hope that there is additional federal money.

Homelessness

All sources of CARES Act financing dedicated to homelessness prevention run out at the end of November (Couleecap WRAP program). That program has been highly successful in keeping people housed and stable during the pandemic. I had a discussion with La Crosse Areas Family Collaborative, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Independent Living Resources about the needs on the ground and strategies. There was consensus about using funds to launch a prevention fund (6 months of rental assistance, mortgage assistance, and a security deposit) and offer 6-month of rental assistance or cover case management. In conversations with the State of Wisconsin, they are considering funding a mortgage assistance program state-wide and there is a second round of homeless funding that has yet to be announced (ESG). It is uncertain if the WRAP program will be funded again.

Catholic Charities is looking for extra space for the winter. They may require assistance or may not. There are several possibilities being explored and the group seems confident they will identify a solution- including collaboration with the Salvation Army, finding office space to create additional space at the warming shelter.

La Crosse County Health Department

- Starting January 1st, will be unable to pay for quarantining individuals who are Covid-19 positive and homeless.
- After December 31, 2020, all funds related to free testing sites run by National Guard and contact tracing, run out (except for \$500,000). They need funds to continue contact tracing. Secondly, free testing is a priority because the health centers only run testing for symptomatic individuals. This testing would be aimed at low-income populations.
- Funds for planning and analysis around Covid-19
- When asked to prioritize, the County Health Department said contact tracing

Live Poll for the Meeting

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Staff Analysis and Recommendation:

Wait to decide use of funds. Consider releasing funding plan in November CDC or December CDC.

Each one of these areas present a huge need. A collaboration between La Crosse County and the City of La Crosse could address a lot of these areas but they are still considering their options. It remains unknown what funds will be provided to address homelessness by Covid-19, if any federal help is coming for contact tracing and testing or for child care.

Re-convene with the County before Novembers meeting