

Proposal for Utilization of the Old Mayo Hospital as a Homeless Shelter

Presented by:

Marsha Kurth, Citizen of La Crosse

Introduction

Good evening, members of the council and fellow citizens. My name is Marsha Kurth, and I am a resident of La Crosse. I am here to propose an initiative that could greatly benefit our community by addressing the critical issue of homelessness.

Background

The city has again proposed using Houska Park as a designated camping area for the unsheltered. However, the past attempt at this solution was fraught with problems. Instead of repeating an ineffective strategy, I am suggesting you consider utilizing the old Mayo Clinic Hospital as a more suitable and humane alternative.

With the Mayo Clinic's new hospital opening soon and plans to demolish the old hospital within a couple of years, we have a unique opportunity. Instead of letting the old hospital sit unused until its demolition, we can repurpose it to serve as a temporary shelter for the homeless as Pathways Home continues long term plans. Importantly, if the Mayo Clinic plans to leave behind hospital beds, kitchen facilities, towels, bedding, and other essential items, it will significantly reduce the setup costs and time.

Objectives

- **Provide Immediate Shelter:** Use the old hospital to offer immediate, temporary housing for homeless individuals and families.
- **Enhance Community Support Services:** Integrate essential support services, including healthcare, mental health counseling, job training, and placement programs.
- **Promote Stability and Self-Sufficiency:** Assist residents in transitioning to permanent housing and stable employment, reducing the long-term burden on community resources.

Proposal

Facility Utilization

- **Temporary Lease:** Propose a temporary lease agreement with the Mayo Clinic to use the old hospital for up to two years or until demolition.
- **Facility Adaptation:** Make use of existing hospital infrastructure, including beds, kitchen facilities, towels, and bedding, to quickly and cost-effectively accommodate residential living.
- **Scalability:** Utilize the hospital's existing security systems to secure and manage only the necessary floors, allowing the shelter to scale its capacity up or down based on demand. This ensures efficient use of space and resources while maintaining safety and security.

Support Services

- **Healthcare Services:** The old hospital's proximity to the Reach Center and the St. Clare Health Mission enhances access to additional healthcare services and community support.
- **Case Management:** Assign case managers will know where to find residents, to help navigate services and develop plans for self-sufficiency.
- **Student Involvement:** Engage students from Viterbo University, which is located on the same block as the hospital. These students can volunteer or intern, providing valuable support in areas such as healthcare, social services, and administrative tasks. This collaboration would offer students practical experience while benefiting the shelter's operations.

Funding and Resources

- **City and County Contributions:** Allocate funds from city and county budgets to cover operational costs, including staffing, utilities, and maintenance.
- **Grants and Donations:** Pursue state and federal grants, as well as donations from private entities and community organizations.
- **Volunteer Support:** Engage local volunteers and non-profit organizations to assist with shelter operations.

Community Impact

- **Reduction in Homelessness:** Provide immediate relief for the homeless population in La Crosse, offering a safe and supportive environment.
- **Improved Public Health and Safety:** Enhance access to healthcare and support services, reducing the strain on emergency services and improving overall community health.
- **Educational Benefits:** Provide college students with hands-on experience in their fields of study, fostering a sense of community involvement and professional growth.
- **Community Support and Buy In:** This approach not only benefits those directly affected by homelessness but also fosters a more inclusive and compassionate community.

Conclusion

Repurposing the old Mayo Hospital as a temporary homeless shelter is a compassionate and pragmatic response to homelessness in our community. This proposal addresses immediate housing needs while integrating essential support services to promote long-term stability and self-sufficiency. By utilizing the existing infrastructure left by the Mayo Clinic, we can minimize setup costs and expedite the process of providing shelter. Additionally, the scalability of the hospital's infrastructure and security allows us to use only the necessary floors, making efficient use of space and resources. Engaging college students adds an educational component, enriching their learning experience while benefiting our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.