

Christine J Clair
128 29th St. So.
La Crosse, WI 54601

February 13, 2020

Martin Gaul, President and Council Member
Andrea Richmond, Council Member
Scott Neumeister, Council Member
Barb Janssen, Council Member
Larry Sleznikow, Council Member
Justice Weaver, Council Member
Chris Kahlow, Council Member
Gary Padesky, Council Member
Jessica Olson, Council Member
Phillip Ostrem, Council Member
Paul Medinger, Council Member
Doug Happel, Council Member
Roger Christians, Council Member

City Hall
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Re: Agenda Item #20-0011

Dear City Council Members,

I respectfully request that you deny the re-zoning request #20-0011 on the February 13th agenda. I further request that the Grandma's Gateway plan go back to the Park Board for review and that any subsequent recommendation have to come back to the elected Common Council for approval, before any action be taken of the Grandma's Gateway Plan.

This request is being made for the reasons outlined in previous letters to Mayor Kabat; Paul Medinger, Chair of the Parks Board of Commissioners; City Planning Commission members; and Judiciary & Administration Committee members.

I would add the following information and positions.

1. Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan (HFCP) 2005

Additional trails, especially in regard to mountain bike trails on the north, west and south face of Grandad's Bluff, have NOT been a part of any previous planning.

HFCP was adopted in 2005. It was a plan that addressed the ecological assessment of Hixon Forest and produced a natural resource and recreation management plan. In regard to recreational management, the HFCP stated the following.

"Hixon Forest, at over 800 acres, provides many opportunities for people to engage in active and passive recreation. Due to the characteristics of Hixon Forest, recreation activities shall only take place that are not detrimental to the health of the forest. This is an important consideration, considering the slopes present in The Forest. Based on the 1999 La Crosse County Soil Survey, 91.6% of Hixon Forest (~740 acres) is very limited for recreational trail development (La Crosse County Soil Survey, 1999). This means that the soil has one or more features that are unfavorable for trail development. These limitations generally cannot be overcome without major soil reclamation, special design, or expensive installation procedures, and poor performance and high maintenance can be expected. Only 7.7% (~62 acres) is not limited, indicating very favorable conditions where good performance and low maintenance can be expected (see figure 6). (Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan, p. 32)

New trails should not be built in existing Hixon Forest, due to the present abundance of trails, and potential complications because of the slopes. If new trails are ultimately deemed necessary, they should only be developed in disturbed communities. As trails are built or rebuilt over time, reasonable efforts must be made to accommodate accessible facilities in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Because of slope issues, and the potential damage that can occur when trails are soft, trails in Hixon Forest should be closed during wet conditions, with notices posted at the Milson Court and Weather Station trail heads." (Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan, p. 33)

The 1999 La Crosse County Soil Survey is consistent with the report that I obtained from the USDA in January 2020. **The SCIENCE remains the same.** (Attached in the legislative record.)

2. The Blufflands 2016

"Recreation activities currently allowed in Hixon Forest include hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and some mountain biking. Activities not allowed in Hixon Forest include motorized recreational activities, overnight camping, paintball, rock climbing, and other activities that 'increase threats to personal safety or potential for negative

impacts on habitat, promote erosion, reduce tranquility, etc.” (The Blufflands 2016, p. 14)

“When asked what type of recreational opportunities there should be more of in the bluff lands, the top response was hiking.” (The Blufflands 2016, p. 15)

“Whereas the La Crosse Bluffland trail is proposed as a share-use trail that allows bikers in a touring mode, other new trails dedicated primarily to biking use would be a valuable addition to the Blufflands. This could include downhill and freeride trails, in areas of lesser ecological importance deemed appropriate for the more extensive disturbance typical with such trails.” (The Blufflands 2016, p. 53)

“Every Blufflands site is unique, and each site should be evaluated for recreation suitability. Many sites have areas deserving protection from recreational use, such as dry bluff prairies or steep, erodible slopes...”
(The Blufflands 2016, p. 52)

3. Hixon gift to City, our response to the family’s request, and the impact on our actions on future conservational gifts to the City.

“In 1911, well-known landscape architect John Nolen created a park plan for the City of La Crosse and planned Hixon Forest (including Grandad Bluff) to be the largest park in the City. In 1912 the Hixons donated their land (Hixon Forest) to the City. It was the intent that the land would be preserved as a parkland for future generations to enjoy. Ellen Hixon is considered the pioneer of bluffland preservation in the regions (as well as the first female conservationist in Wisconsin.)” (The Blufflands 2016, p. 19)

“I am gravely concerned about the impact on the gift that my Great Great Grandmother gave to the City of La Crosse for the benefit of all citizens of La Crosse.” (Fred Hixon Glore letter to Mayor Kabat; Feb. 2, 2020)

“It is my belief that this proposed trail network will create a permanent scar on one of the areas’s most important landmarks.” (Fred Hixon Glore letter to Mayor Kabat; Feb. 2, 2020)

“I spent many hours with Ellen’s daughter-in-law, Alice Hixon (my great grandmother) and Ellen’s granddaughter, Ellen Hixon Glore (my grandmother) both in La Crosse and in Illinois and they shared with me that vision that Ellen Hixon had on many occasions. The primary focus was always on the

preservation of this land and not its exploitation for a limited group of people.” (Fred Hixon Glore letter to Mayor Kabat; Feb. 2, 2020)

4. Recent rockslide and boulder dislocation near access site and rezoning parcels.

The Parks Dept. were notified on Dec. 29, 2019 of a significant rockslide and boulder dislocation (that almost hit a home) in the summer, around the timeframe and area of where trail planners were flagging the area (There is a picture of a flagged tree.). The Parks Dept. withheld that information from the Parks Board, the public and the neighbors who were raising concerns consistent with this incident. I have removed the name of the homeowner, but the Parks Dept. has the original email and can identify that person. Their home is located within the 200’ area of the rezoning plots and has the same soil composition and unsuitability rating for recreational use as the entire area above the homes on 29th St. and Ebner Coulee Rd. I will leave photos that were attached to this email at your seats during the Common Council meeting.

“Date:

Sun, Dec

29, 2019

at 3:46

PM

Subject:

Grandad'

Gateway

Trail

Concerns

To: <ode2? r-nilril itvoflacrosse.org>, <flottmeyerj@cityoflacrosse.org>

Hello Jay and James,

I'm writing to you with a few concerns I have with the section of trail proposed at the base of Grandad's Bluff. I live at

' 29th Street South, down slope from the proposed trail.

First, I want you to know that I'm not opposed to the trail overall. I believe improving public access, including hiking and biking opportunities has the potential to be very positive for the community and folks that live near the bluff. However, I am concerned with the proposed trail segment that runs along the base of Grandad's Bluff. This segment is located along a very steep slope that is already prone to slides and, given the steepness of the slope, trail construction would require extensive soil and rock moving to build a flat trail wide enough to walk and bike on.

To demonstrate how prone this slope is to slides and the steepness of the grade here, I've attached photos from a rockslide that occurred this past summer and a photo of flagging on the proposed route. The slide initiated 25-50 feet up slope from the proposed trail and multiple large rocks made it down, well past the proposed trail, and came to a stop just

short of my house. I'm very concerned that disturbing this steep slope could worsen the severity of future slides or even cause a slide in the next major rainfall.

In the attached photo "Slide_1", you can see the clean white dolomite rock and downed trees, which moved in the slide last summer. "Slide_2" shows one large rock that was stopped by a tree just up slope from my house (you can see where the bark was ripped up by the impact). If you'd like to take a look at the area in person, the slide is located at (roughly): 43.81192,-91.21187.

Otherwise, let me know and I'll be happy to hike up and show you.

Thank you for your time,

Again, I respectfully request that you deny the re-zoning request #20-0011 on the February 13th agenda. I further request that the Grandma's Gateway plan go back to the Park Board for review and that any subsequent recommendation have to come back to the elected Common Council for approval, before any action be taken of the Grandma's Gateway Plan.

Sincerely,

Christine J, Clair
608-792-9746