

Craig, Sondra

From: Elsen, Nikki
Sent: Wednesday, August 11, 2021 11:14 AM
To: Craig, Sondra
Subject: FW: Riverside Park Fish Hatchery Building
Attachments: Fish Hatchery Building in Riverside Park.docx; Fish Hatchery RFP.pdf

I am not sure if I forwarded these attachments to you.
They should be attached to the respective file.

Nikki M. Elsen, WCMC

City Clerk
City of La Crosse
608-789-7555 phone
elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org

From: Odegaard, Jason
Sent: Tuesday, August 10, 2021 10:18 AM
To: ZZ Council Members <ZZCouncilMembers@cityoflacrosse.org>
Cc: Reynolds, Mitch <reynoldsm@cityoflacrosse.org>; Rucker, Caley <ruckerc@cityoflacrosse.org>
Subject: Riverside Park Fish Hatchery Building

Good Morning Council Members,

I wanted to take a moment to share information regarding the up-coming re-zoning legislation for the Fish Hatchery Building in Riverside Park. I am sure that many, if not all, of you have been contacted by constituents concerning this matter. I have attached a summary for information, that I will also be using during my meeting with River Place Apartment residents today. I would be more than happy to discuss any further questions or concerns you may have, prior to Thursdays Council Meeting.

Thank You

Jay Odegaard

Director
La Crosse Parks, Recreation, Forestry, & Facilities
400 La Crosse Street
First Floor City Hall
La Crosse, WI 54601
Phone 608*789*7593
odegaardj@cityoflacrosse.org

A ship is safe in the harbor—but that's not what ships are for.

Fish Hatchery Building in Riverside Park

The current structure referred to as, the Fish Hatchery Building, was originally constructed in 1907. This building was utilized as a sub-station for the Manchester, Iowa station operated by the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries. During this time the primary use of the building was to house rescued fish from overflowed lands in the river valley. In 1959, the building operations were transferred to the Fish Research Division. In 1962, the name changed to the U.S. Fish Control Laboratory. In 1978, the U.S. Fish Control Laboratory was replaced by a new facility built in La Crosse. Shortly thereafter, the building became occupied by the La Crosse Area Visitor Convention Bureau. The National Register of Historic Places nomination papers were submitted in 1981.

The building, now owned by the City of La Crosse, housed the La Crosse Area Visitor Convention Bureau on the north end of Riverside Park. Later, the first floor of the building became home to a museum operated by the La Crosse County Historical Society. During this time, maintenance and upkeep was the responsibility of the City of La Crosse. Over the last decade, the Parks and Recreation Department continued to face increasing maintenance costs to the 100-year-old structure. In an attempt to address these concerns, a rent structure was implemented with the La Crosse Area Visitor Convention Bureau (LCVB) at \$1,200 per month. In 2019, due to structural concerns and inadequate space needs, the museum vacated the building to the current downtown location. The Park and Recreation Department continued to work with the now La Crosse County Visitor Convention Bureau (LCCVB) to finalize a long-term lease agreement that would assist in the deferred maintenance and renovations needed to the building. The Parks Department also put a request into the 2021 Capital Improvement Budget for \$500,000. This request was to address structural concerns primarily related to the first floor. The contract included replacing the glass block windows, removing old carpet/drywall, bringing back the original 3 doors look in the front, and making the first floor ADA compliant. The Parks Department has also requested \$500,000 in the 2022 Capital Improvement Budget to replace the roof of the building and address structural concerns with the adjacent garage. The Parks Department worked with the Historic Preservation Committee to ensure that this project maintained the historic esthetics of the building.

With the uncertainty of the LCCVB, discussions the Parks Department worked with the Planning Department to begin a search for perspective tenants. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was crafted and promoted to the city's website. (This RFP is attached) Major components of the RFP included offering an amenity to park users, investing private capital funds toward the building, and paying an annual rent to assist in long-term maintenance. Accessibility concerns and building condition played a major factor in the LCCVB boards decision to purchase property in downtown La Crosse. With their departure, the Parks Department worked diligently with interested investors to solicit business proposals. During this time, the Parks Department worked with the Planning and Inspections Departments to navigate the appropriate permitting needed for the building. It was at this time that the issue related to the zoning change became apparent. In order to offer any overnight stay operations, the zoning needed to be changed from Public/Semi-Public to Commercial. It is important to note, that this zoning change needs to be completed for any office space related to a private partner in any City owned facility. Only governmental offices are permitted in the current zoning. However, governmental offices cannot be held on the second floor of a non-ADA compliant facility.

For this reason, the Parks Department approached the council with a desire to re-zone the use of the Fish Hatchery Building. Re-zoning is a key component to implementing a sustainable and fiscally responsible use of the second floor of the building. Due to the nature of the structure and restrictions surrounding the historical aesthetics, installing an elevator is not an option. The current public/semi-public zoning allows the “beer garden” and event venue use, permitted by the Board of Park Commissioners. I also would like to clear-up some misconceptions that this facility will only serve as a wedding venue or “beer garden”. The business proposal involves much more for the everyday park user. With the legislation solely focusing on re-zoning it has been difficult not to reflect on the business plan associated with it. While this is understandable, it is important to note that the re-zoning will more than likely need to be done for any use other than operations run by the City of La Crosse. If the building is re-zoned, the business proposal will be fully vetted through the Board of Park Commissioners, ultimately coming before the council for final approval.

This is not a new concept for the City, nor the Parks Department. Forest Hills, Copeland Field, The Myrick Center, Pettibone Boat Club, and the Pump House are just a few of the many successful private/public partnerships that benefit the residents of La Crosse. These partnership structures are what allow these facilities to offer experiences to the community, and in turn, makes La Crosse such a wonderful place to live and visit.

Riverside Park has gone through a multitude of changes since the early 1900s. This evolution has proved to be effective in making this park the “crown jewel” of the city parks system. With the increase in big boat traffic and emergence of Viking Cruise Line, Riverside Park is proven to also be a Mississippi River destination stop for the world. Like the rebuilt fountain, the covered bandstand, the rotary lights skating rink, this resurgence of the Fish Hatchery Building will be an added amenity to park visitors and provide financial stability to a treasured historic corner piece of Riverside Park.

Staff and I are meeting with the residents of River Place Apartments Tuesday at 11:00 at the South Side Neighborhood Center. It is my intent to share as much information as possible with them. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions, at your convenience.

Jay Odegaard

Park, Recreation, Forestry, and Facilities Director

608-789-7593