

## Lehrke, Teri

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**From:** Kabat, Tim  
**Sent:** Friday, August 28, 2020 8:55 AM  
**To:** Acklin, Tim; Lehrke, Teri  
**Subject:** FW: Concerns: Catholic Charities Rezoning Request

Hi,

I am forwarding communication received regarding the Catholic Charities request for the record.

Thank you.

Tim

*Tim Kabat*

Mayor  
City of La Crosse  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
(608) 789-7500  
[www.cityoflacrosse.org](http://www.cityoflacrosse.org)

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**From:** Courtney Lokken <lokken.courtney@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 25, 2020 2:21 PM  
**To:** Olson, Jessica <olsonje@cityoflacrosse.org>; Kabat, Tim <kabatt@cityoflacrosse.org>; Kahlow, Chris <kahlowc@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Cc:** Lucas Schwaller <lucas.schwaller@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** Concerns: Catholic Charities Rezoning Request

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Mayor Kabat, CM Olson, and CM Kahlow,

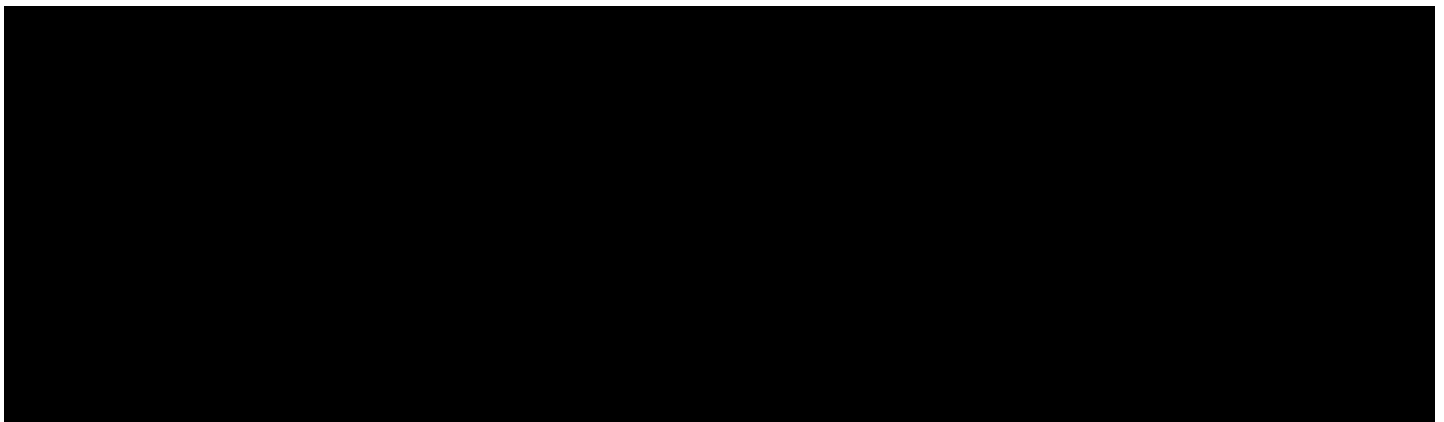
Lucas and I are writing to express concern regarding the Catholic Charities proposal for 508 5th Ave South. Our feelings are complex, making brevity challenging, and we want to thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns.

We respect and value the critical services Catholic Charities provides to members of our community. We are grateful for their work and fully support their mission. Our concern lies not in the value or need for Catholic Charities services but in the density of services in the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown La Crosse.

Blight is of grave concern in the Downtown and Washburn neighborhoods, and residents have experienced significant quality of life issues over the last few years. Unfortunately, the Downtown Neighborhood has become a hub for drug activity, theft, vandalism, violence, trespassing, and more. While we wish this activity was not tied to vagrancy, we have seen firsthand, time and time again, crime being committed by folks who have lived in the parks, squatted in abandoned properties, lived in vehicles on our boulevards, and flopped in blighted rental properties.

We have found needles where our children play. We've had wanted felons squatting two doors down in a vacant property. We've experienced trespassing by thieves who cut through our yard during a string of burglaries (these thieves were found to be squatting in a vacant property, which thankfully has since been torn down). My children have watched car windows being smashed during a fight between people staying in the neighboring flop house. I've seen a tire slashed by a known car thief. That same car thief also once hung out on our boulevard all day, wearing a sheathed knife on his belt while brandishing an axe and hitting it into the grass. We've had litter left on our boulevards and along our garage by persons living in vehicles out front of our home. My husband has been sexually harassed and threatened while out front watering the lawn (this person regularly sleeps in Cameron Park).

I hesitate to name some of these individuals, as I have compassion for whatever has happened in their life to lead them to such challenged places, but I think it is helpful to see examples of the types of personalities we have encountered firsthand on 8th St South. Below are names and links. These crimes did not necessarily occur on 8th St South, but these are some of the individuals who have caused significant disturbances and directly decreased our sense of safety on our block. Unfortunately, there are many more individuals and an array of disturbing behavior that we have encountered over the years.



At this time, I would like to reiterate our concern: **We feel the density of services is a major factor contributing to the negative culture of vagrancy in our neighborhood.** Service providers are by no means exclusively responsible, but density of services is, without a doubt, contributing to the problems experienced as a direct result of vagrancy in our neighborhoods.

We do not for a moment believe that all persons who are homeless are a threat. On the contrary! We recognize that there are many respectful and well-intentioned persons who are utilizing the services of Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army to improve their lives, and we celebrate those successes. We also recognize that the density of individuals struggling with drug addiction, mental health, criminal behavior, and chronic homelessness is causing challenges both to the residents of our neighborhoods and to the homeless population itself.

We feel clustering services within blocks of each other in Downtown La Crosse is a grave mistake. Not only does it negatively impact quality of life in our neighborhoods, we feel it also negatively impacts people who are seeking help but cannot escape the challenges of drugs and other debilitating behavior due to the density of people sharing these same struggles.

This is an incredibly complex problem, one that is not exclusive to La Crosse. Certainly, systemic solutions are needed at a higher level for lasting change to occur. In the short term, we ask the city to recognize the negative impact the density of services is having on our core neighborhoods and to work to reduce density whenever possible. We need to revitalize our neighborhoods and make them safe places for all people to live.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm Regards,