

## Grief

I grieve, as an elected member of our Common Council, over how many citizens of our town live in extreme poverty. The fact that people live in squalor, within communal encampments, in a swamp within our city limits is the source of my grieving.

An estimated hundreds of people living in La Crosse make personal decisions to either live in the swamp or to hide in the many corners of our town that are not dwellings at all where they hope to pass night after night in the rough, on the street.

As I reflect upon this source of my grief, and listen to the deliberations of my Council colleagues struggling to find best policy solutions, I ask, "How much burden can our community carry?" "How much stress can it handle?" "Where is its breaking point?"

In engineering terms, our municipality is a complex adaptive system. This means that it has many (even a vast multitude of) parts that work together to sustain its existence. And because it is adaptive, it is able to produce unexpected and even surprising solutions for holding on to its integrity even when stresses augment.

A quality that all systems share is that when they are overstressed, they fail. As a local government it is our duty to obviate the failure of our city.

Another quality of complex adaptive systems is that they have a purpose. Our municipality has a purpose. It is to create a preferential place for people to live. Failing that, it will become a landscape of abandoned buildings and vacant spaces as failed cities or partial failed cities have done.

All complex systems have methods, procedures and mechanisms for their many parts to interact with each other. Our municipality has this quality as well. We share an implied contract that we will live as good neighbors with each other. This works as our essential mechanism for creating a city. When neighborliness falters, our village systems begin to crack. Too many cracks, and we will fail. We will be unable to achieve our purpose for creating a preferential place for people to live.

So, what happens when residents within our municipal system persist in demonstrating unneighborly behavior towards others in a chronic fashion? How are the policy makers of our adaptive system going to find new ways to relieve that stress?

I think I'm right in my belief that ongoing inaction is an abandonment of responsibility for our Council.

The burden of my share in this responsibility compounds my grief.

I think this sadness is comparable to that of a parent in a family with a child who should have transitioned to independent and successful adulthood, who instead remains showing disruptive behavior in their family life and never leaves, causing dysfunctional

anguish and chaos for other family members. Even as much as a parent might worry about the future of their child at some point, they know that the disruptive member needs to leave for the sake of the integrity of the family. This liberation from co-dependency is named tough love.

We have to ask ourselves at what point do we need to accept that we can no longer condone city residents squatting with their homesteads within public space where many in that space persistently display overtly unneighborly behavior toward each other and toward other members of our community?

Perhaps we have to accept our grief and recognize that it is time for some people to leave.

They are not helping our municipality as a system to achieve its purpose, therefore they can go.

Families in this kind of circumstances will sometimes change the locks on their doors.

Comparably, our city can chose to adapt our ordinance 32-5 to make it unlawful for camping within all public space.