

The Human Right to Shelter

Article 25 of the International Declaration on Human Rights proclaims

*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, **housing** and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

I believe this.

I also believe that we as Americans fall way short in our respect for and guarding of these delineated human rights. We as a national society with all of our economic wealth continue to misuse that wealth for the good of all of our citizens. We continue to make national economic policy decisions to favor the wealth of some citizens to accrue ever more wealth and to deprive the economically disadvantaged citizens of our nation of the many protections for health and well-being that we can easily afford as a country. We have the economic capacity to provide an effective response to our substance abuse epidemic. We can provide housing for all of our citizens and visitors to our country. We can provide mental health services for all. We can improve the social determinants of health across the board for all, and yet we chose to shame, exclude, ignore and incriminate those among us who are the economic losers in America.

We as an American people fail on our report card before the international community of nations.

We as a Council and the policy makers for our local government are allowed to ask ourselves how we can lead our local community to do better.

Even though I believe that as a nation we are failing, I don't believe the same for our local community. Our citizens of good will and good faith strive to respect and honor the right of all people who live in our town to experience a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being. Our community has a multitude of service providers, charitable organizations and faith communities that strive to achieve the goals of Article 25. And our local government **does what it can** as is evidenced by its management of the use of ARPA funds during the pandemic and pandemic recovery. Our local government stives to find more ways to achieve more affordable housing within our city limits. Our local government stives to collaborate with our county in the Pathways Home Project and to collaborate with all of our charitable, non-profit and for-profit service agencies.

I honestly believe that we do a lot to protect the rights of people as described in Article 25. More than that I believe **we continue to long to do more.**

We are compelled, however, to only do what we can. The expectation that we can somehow do beyond our actual capabilities is an injustice to all of our citizens for thinking that we can place upon them a burden that they cannot carry. As policy makers it's upon us to identify where the limits of our local capabilities exist.

The problem of homelessness in America is an American national problem that has been cast upon us as a local community without our choosing or control. It is wrong for us to believe that we can carry that burden to the point of compromise or even destruction of our primary mission to make La Crosse a preferred place for people to live. Because we as a community are at odds with the wider policy decisions that are established at higher levels of government in our state and in our country, this doesn't give us the right to blame ourselves for being incapable of doing more to correct all of these social ills beyond our control.