

Elsen, Nikki

From: JMcKL-DSL <sqrbluff@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 6, 2024 2:54 PM
To: Elsen, Nikki; Trane, Andrea; Hawkins, Chadwick; Gallager, Matthew; Reynolds, Mitch; Schwarz, Rebecca; Dickinson, Tamra
Subject: Public Works meeting Monday, April 8

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To Mayor Reynolds and members of the Public Works Committee:

My husband and I are writing this in anticipation of the vote on a proposed ordinance to end camping on specific city owned parcels located within the marsh.

We relocated to La Crosse about a year ago and selected our new residence specifically for its access to the marsh. We became members of Friends of the Marsh and have been volunteering to help eliminate invasive plants in an effort to maintain this delicate and unique ecosystem. By being out on the trails we have had a first hand opportunity to see how much people, both residents and tourists, enjoy this resource- whether for nature watching or just being able to get out for a walk through a beautiful green space in the middle of the city.

Hence, the movement of unsheltered Individuals from the cleared riverside encampment on Monday, March 18th into the marsh is deeply disturbing for a number of reasons:

From an environmental aspect, the campsite waste is going directly into the waters of the marsh, which is both a potential biohazard and pollutant. This will only be exacerbated if we get any flash flooding this spring. And on the flip side, if the drought continues, the campfires started by the campers have the potential to cause areas of the marsh to burn. For these reasons alone, camping by **anyone** should not be allowed. The campsites are also creating a lot of noise and activity in the interior of the marsh (off trail) which is disruptive to both the bird and animal populations, some of which are already threatened. At last count, there were at least 24 campsites in the marsh area bordered by the Asfoor and Veteran's trails east of Copeland Ave. As these sites grow and become more established, the future clean up becomes an even bigger issue. An excessive amount of hand labor will be required to clean up the marsh without disrupting its ecological balance. Heavy equipment, such as that used in the riverside clean-up would destroy large areas of the marsh, so could not be used (one only needs to look at the effort Xcel Energy has had to take to protect the ground and vegetation).

From an economic aspect, we are already observing a growing disinterest in promoting the marsh as an asset to potential users, be they tourists or local residents. Personally, we have stopped inviting friends from outside La Crosse to visit, since one of the main reasons was to enjoy the natural beauty and quiet of the marsh. I suspect, if the current situation is permitted to continue, the marsh will no longer be a feature in attracting new people, including students, to our area. No one is immune to the negative impact of observing drug deals, loud verbal disputes and seeing the marsh used as an outhouse in full view of the trails. Police are getting overwhelmed with calls and their help is limited by having no ordinances to enforce. Unfortunately, the city is becoming increasingly inured to nuisance complaints regarding the unsheltered, so people are just avoiding the marsh. Hence the actions of a few are beginning to affect a large number of people, some of whom use the trails to access the city. The long term implication of this is not a good one for the city of La Crosse.

And finally, we are deeply disappointed that the City of La Crosse is not more concerned about the marsh itself. It is clear that we all need to invest in helping unsheltered individuals find housing. And it is clear that good efforts are being made to reduce homelessness, particularly the *Pathways* program and *Karuna*. However, that being said, it is our feeling that the proposed camping ban in the marsh should not be viewed as another example of "not in our backyard" but rather as an effort to preserve a unique conservancy that benefits our city.

Thank you,

Jennifer and David Lupes
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