



## PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

400 LA CROSSE STREET | LA CROSSE, WI 54601 | P: (608) 789-7512

### Memorandum

**To: Common Council  
La Crosse Historic and Cultural Museum Planning Task Force  
La Crosse Historic and Cultural Museum Planning Advisory Committee**

**From: Tim Acklin, Senior Planner**

**Date: August 12, 2019**

**Re: Summary of Planning Efforts to Date**

In January 2018 the Common Council adopted a Resolution creating the La Crosse Historic and Cultural Museum Planning Task Force and a separate, non-voting advisory committee. Both committees were made up of community members representing various interests, organizations, and backgrounds with the desire and expertise to support the La Crosse County Historical Society in its effort to explore the potential for a destination museum.

The Planning Department introduced the committees to the concept of pattern writing and how it can be used in this process. Pattern writing is used to understand the relationship of human activity and how to best design the built environment for it. This process includes predesign, project programming, site evaluation. Schematic design, design development, and final documents. The Planning Department also stated the importance of establishing a critical path for the project that identifies a timeline and key steps in the process. These next steps included establishing a Vision Statement, Mission Statement, and goals for the Task Force. It also included data gathering which consisted of a literature review on developing museums, collecting stories (likes & dislikes) from both committees on their visits to museums, visiting several local archives and museums to understand what they do and current constraints, and visit three regional museums to talk with their staff and learn their history of how they got started.

Very early in the process several committee members asked about immediately looking for an existing historic building to use for the museum or watching for buildings to be put out on the market. Planning stated that it could certainly be an option but the Task Force has yet to determine what is needed, such as square footage, location, theme, etc.

It was also asked of the Planning Department what the City's role in the museum would be and who would operate it. Planning stated that the City has no intention of owning a museum, or a building to house one in. The City's desire is to help find the La Crosse County Historical Society a new home by creating something bigger that draws visitors from all over and provides them with a memorable experience. This would be determined by the efforts of the Task Force.

JASON GILMAN, AICP, PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR  
TIM ACKLIN, AICP, SENIOR PLANNER  
ANDREA SCHNICK, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNER  
LEWIS KUHLMAN, AICP, ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNER  
JACK ZABROWSKI, ASSOCIATE PLANNER  
ASHLEY MARSHALL, CLERK STENO III

CAROLINE GREGERSON, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATOR  
DAWN REINHART, NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE  
TARA FITZGERALD, PROGRAM COORDINATOR  
KEVIN CLEMENTS, HOUSING SPECIALIST  
KEVIN CONROY, HOUSING REHABILITATION SPECIALIST

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## **Vision Statement**

Planning led the Task Force in a vision exercise that consisted of 6 questions that were designed to obtain aspirational, inspirational, and motivational responses on what they would like the end result of this process to be. Below is the statement that was developed and adopted based off of their responses.

*"Engaging and Inspiring People of all ages with a Memorable La Crosse Area Historical Experience"*

## **Mission Statement**

Planning also led the Task Force in a mission statement exercise. A mission statement is a short statement of an organization or group's purpose. Below is the statement that was developed and adopted based off of their responses.

*"Collaborating to identify location, design thematic elements and an initial business plan for a sustainable La Crosse Historic and Cultural Museum"*

## **Local Museum & Archival Visits**

The Task Force visited the following:

### **La Crosse County Historical Society (LCHS)**

The tour was provided by the Executive Director, Board President, and staff of their facility at 145 West Avenue S. The Task Force was provided with an overview what their function is, what services they provide, their archival and storage needs, and their current building's limitations,

### **Riverside Museum**

The tour was provided by Bob Taunt, a volunteer with the museum. The Task Force was provided with an overview of the museum's constraints, which includes space and lack of temperature control. Bob also stated that the museum has a lot of walking traffic, had a very successful "Night at the Museum" event for kids, and does have a very good collection of artifacts, particularly from the War Eagle.

### **St Rose Convent**

The tour was provided by Mary Ann Gschwind, who is also on the Task Force, and the archivist for the Franciscan Sisters for Perpetual Adoration. (FSPA) The Task Force was shown their archival facility and given a tour of their collections of artifacts.

## **Regional Museum Visits**

The Task Force agreed on the visiting three museums in the region that were determined to be successful in terms of theme, experience, long-term existence, etc. All of these visits included a tour the museum, including archives, storage, exhibit construction, as well as a meeting with the museum's Executive Director and staff, past Executive Directors, and other people who were instrumental in the museum's success. A common theme was heard from each visit. It is important to understand what the community will support and start building advocacy. This is conducted with Feasibility Studies. This applies to both financial support and its historic roots. It's important to determine what you want to do before you start looking for a building or developing plans. Once you figure out what you want to do

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you work with a museum story planner, exhibit designer and architect to start developing plans and renderings to illustrate your theme. These are then used for capital campaigns, fundraising, grant writing, etc. Important to also plan for future expansion. It was also mentioned that this is can be a 10-20 year process.

Below each museum visited is a link to the complete notes that were taken.

National Mississippi River Museum in Dubuque, IA,

[https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/filestorage/407/463/Dubuque\\_NMRM\\_Visit\\_Notes2.docx](https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/filestorage/407/463/Dubuque_NMRM_Visit_Notes2.docx)

Vesterheim Norwegian American Museum in Decorah, IA,

[https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/filestorage/407/463/Norwegian\\_Museum\\_Tour\\_Notes.docx](https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/filestorage/407/463/Norwegian_Museum_Tour_Notes.docx)

Chippewa Valley Museum in Eau Claire, WI.

[https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/filestorage/407/463/Chippewa\\_Valley\\_Museum\\_Tour\\_February\\_19.docx](https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/filestorage/407/463/Chippewa_Valley_Museum_Tour_February_19.docx)

The Task Force also invited the Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society to hear about their current effort to build a new State Historical Museum in Madison.

## **Goal Setting**

From the information and data that was gathered the Planning Department led the Task Force through a goal setting exercise and established the following goals

### **Short Term**

1. Develop a project timetable that includes best practices in museum planning, including capital generation and stakeholder engagement.
2. Investigate the cost and scoping of a museum planning, feasibility and sustainability study, while also identifying qualified consulting firms.
3. Raise Funding to undertake a project planning, feasibility and sustainability study.
4. Create a stakeholder engagement plan, identifying all stakeholders beyond the task force and advisory group and gather information, build advocacy and invite participation in the project.
5. Create a public relations strategy on the project and identify an informational source, “managing the story” through a specific entity who engages the public, media and stakeholders with facts.
6. Engage various cultural groups in the City with the key result of giving holistic and respectful attention to our diversity

### **Mid Term**

#### ***Through the feasibility study:***

7. Work on a scope that gives people a memorable experience and one that encourages repeat visits through programming, refreshed exhibits and emotional connections.
8. Identify our audience and set additional goals for numbers of people attracted annually.
9. Communicate the feasibility study to the public and media through story-telling to build community pride and advocacy in the project
10. Revise the project timeline as needed
11. Identify the educational opportunities of the project
12. Identify project themes that maximize peoples relationship to the stories , themes and experiences of the project

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13. Consider project locational priorities
14. Build political support
15. Identify museum themes and permanent exhibits
16. Identify economic cycles, grant programs and other funding opportunities and consider professional assistance in pursuing funding.

## Long Term (This section will need refinement as the feasibility study recommends)

17. Continue work on public advocacy building and the public perception of the historical society and project.
18. Raise capital to implement project goals beyond the feasibility phase, including the establishment of an endowment.
19. Obtain commitments from partners for funding, support, technical advisement, and beneficial networking.
20. Identify actual sites for new construction and building renovation options and acquire a site
21. Continue to pursue grants to add value to the project
22. Further develop and refine the business plan for sustainability
23. Hire a museum architect to design the facility
  - Produce conceptual and schematic designs and renderings for use in continued funding commitments
  - Develop the designs with stakeholder input and public engagement, continuing to build advocacy
  - Complete construction drawings and specifications and bid project with add-alternates to allow budget control and phasing options
24. Construct and occupy the facility (recommend a soft opening by invitation to work any bugs out before grand opening)

Members of the Task Force were given a tour of the Tribune Building located on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street N as a potential site for the future museum.

## UWL-Feasibility Study

The next step that was identified by the Task Force was to move forward with a feasibility study. A Faculty Member at UW-La Crosse and associated with the UW-La Crosse Tourism Research Institute suggested that they could complete a Feasibility Study that would assist with determining community support. This project would consist of a partnership between UWL faculty and students, the LCHS, and the Task Force that includes a site analysis, revenue sources, projected expenses and cost, evaluate the market area for a new museum, evaluate visitor perceptions and support towards museums, and identify what experience or theme the community desires and/or supports.

## Next Steps

The results from the Feasibility Study will direct the Task Force in what direction to take. Additional information may need to be gathered to support economic feasibility or community support or the Task Force may be able to move forward with working with museum story planners, exhibit designers, and capital campaign/fundraising/ development specialists. The Planning Department has been researching grant opportunities to assist with these next steps.