

Craig, Sondra

From: Nick Roush <nick@roushrentals.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 7, 2024 3:21 PM
To: ZZ Council Members
Subject: Health & Public Safety - Ban Camping & Stop the Crime

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Dear La Crosse City Council Members, Honorable Mayor and City Staff,

I'm writing with great concern regarding the camping ban and the greater underlying issue of crime related to the un-housed population. I speak on behalf of my residents and the places they call home, my staff and as a lifelong part of the La Crosse community, born & raised and heavily invested in the place we call home. **THE TIME IS NOW TO BAN CAMPING** and stop the crime in the city. We must bring an end to the encampments and the ancillary criminal activity they foster.

While I'm very compassionate to those in need who want to do better, there are many within this population who are choosing to live "off grid" and have no interest in productive society. Therefore, we must do the responsible thing and balance our compassionate response of helping those in need, with logic, reason and the health and public safety of the whole. The reality is the collateral damage of the crime related to this population has reached fever pitch. This matter will not wait weeks, months or years for solution. It is the duty of the City elected to uphold the health and public safety of the whole. The health and public safety of their constituency who voted for them. To protect the economic stability and property rights of our community. If we need a reminder of the mission and core values of the council, they can be found right here;

<https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/your-government/city-council/city-council-mission>

Let's look closer at what's actually happening from fostering this bad behavior in our city. To be clear, this is NOT fearmongering. This is an actual account of what has happened and continues to happen on a daily basis.

Our natural resources are being destroyed as people defecate and urinate in our parks, marshlands and rivers. They are leaving TONS, literal tons, of garbage to wash into our waterways, permanently polluting them with needles, glass, plastic and all manor of biohazardous waste and trash. The marsh trail system has been taken over in certain areas, making it impossible and unsafe to use the trails. This has happened at Cameron Park, Washburn Park, Houska Park, River Point district and now the La Crosse River Marsh. To allow this to happen is not protecting our natural resources or health and public safety...this is condoning its destruction. This is causing permanent harm to our natural resources. If a business was pouring garbage into the marsh and rivers, action would be swift and unforgiving...why should it be allowed with this population? It shouldn't, we all must be held to the same account, it must stop.

The lawlessness and criminal acts are no longer acceptable. Condoning and allowing encampments is only fostering bad behavior and making it worse. Need I remind everyone there was a murder at Houska Park? We are directly experiencing crime. Our own residents and staff have experienced multiple vehicle break ins, harassment, larceny and bicycle theft attempts right in broad daylight! Add to that: indecent exposure, public urination and defecation. I've even witnessed someone leaning against the "Welcome to La Crosse" players statue on Rose street defecating by the sidewalk at 10am for the whole world to see. The point here is that we

are all equal under the law, we all must be held to the same account. The very fabric of our society depends on this.

What does all this do from an economic investment and stability perspective? As crime rises, investor confidence in the La Crosse wanes. River Point District represents the potential of \$180 Million+ in investment in our community. Investors expect the law to be upheld and their property rights to be protected. If not, they will go elsewhere. Just a few months ago, the un-housed encampment was moved out of River Point District, only to set up camp a few short blocks away along the La Crosse river Marsh engaging in all of the behaviors outlined above. This tremendously hurts the economic security of the city and has serious long term implications. Especially as La Crosse tries to dig its way out of a huge property tax revenue problem in having the lowest property tax revenue, per capita, in the state for cities our size. We need to do all we can to make La Crosse the destination, not the place to avoid...as we have an encampment next to the "Welcome to La Crosse" sign on Rose St.

In closing, it's simple: camping must be banned and the criminal activity surrounding these issues must be stopped. The health and public safety of the whole can no longer bear the cost. Yes, we should be compassionate and help those who will make use of it. But if someone chooses to live "off grid", to not obey the law, La Crosse is not the place they can do it. We cannot foster or condone these acts. As anyone in treatment services will tell you; "Tough love is the reality. Sometimes the most compassionate thing you can do, is hold someone to account for their actions. Anything else is making the bad behavior OK and there is no incentive for change". We must make the hard choice to hold people accountable and stop the crime.

Sincerely,

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