

City Plan Commission  
City of La Crosse  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

5 June 2020

Re: funding *Hear, Here* project

Dear La Crosse City Plan Commissioners,

I am writing to you in support of sustained funding for *Hear, Here* from the city's Capital Budget. *Hear, Here*, as you likely know, is an interactive network of diverse, location-based stories told by local people, established in downtown La Crosse in 2015. *Hear, Here* strives to share stories told by people from underrepresented groups, and to connect all parts of the community more deeply by telling and listening to personal narratives.

I teach photography at UW La Crosse, and have partnered with *Hear, Here* for the last 5 years. Our photography students have worked in tandem with UWL history students and community members to create photographic content for the project. We take portraits of the storytellers and create photographic illustrations for the stories. The value of participating in *Hear, Here* continues to be immeasurable for our photography students. It is a creative challenge for them to design and fabricate imagery that supports and highlights the stories of *Hear, Here*. By working on this project our students have learned to collaborate with community members, scholars from other departments, and project partners on a long-term, interdisciplinary, service-oriented, public project. They have been challenged to revise and perfect their work until it is ready to present publicly both through the project website and photographic exhibition. The *Hear, Here* Photography Exhibition, which has been exhibited regionally (including: LSE Airport, La Crosse County Administrative Building, the La Crosse Public Library, and UWL Campus), promotes and is contextualized by the greater project. Our students have worked hard and take pride in the work that they have contributed to this beautiful, complex, and relevant project. For our students *Hear, Here* remains an inspiration and prime example of what can be accomplished by collaborating and engagement with the greater community.

Beyond the relevant job skills that our students have gained from *Hear, Here*, interacting with first-person narratives, meeting the storytellers, and visiting story locations has led

UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS phone 608.785.8487  
115 Graff Main Hall fax 608.785.8492  
1725 State St. | La Crosse, WI 54601 USA www.uwlax.edu

them to learn about La Crosse in ways that they would not otherwise be challenged to do. In short, working on *Hear, Here* has heightened their awareness of the unique and complex city and community they live in.

The educational benefits are not limited to those who created *Hear, Here*. The project stands as an educational resource for university students, primary school students, community members and tourists. The *Hear, Here* website provides thorough, age-appropriate curriculum resources for primary school students. And, UWL students from a range of disciplines continually engage with *Hear, Here*. It would be a shame for our community to lose this wonderful educational resource. Further, as community members, hearing our neighbors share diverse stories of hardship, resilience, transition, and existence expands our own understanding of the place we live.

One of the beautiful parts of *Hear, Here* is that it allows users to contribute their own story ideas. And, so, if *Hear, Here* continues to be funded, it will continue to grow and evolve as new stories are added each year. In 2021 we are planning to expand *Hear, Here* to North La Crosse. The need to fund and maintain *Hear, Here* in downtown is especially crucial as the project grows to other neighborhoods in La Crosse.

*Hear, Here* has proven to be successful in encouraging community engagement, placemaking, and broad participation in public art. This project has undoubtedly had a positive effect on the city. I support *Hear, Here* enthusiastically. I encourage you to fund it, and hope it continues to be a vital part of our community.

Sincerely and respectfully,



Kathleen Hawkes  
Associate Professor  
Department of Art  
University of Wisconsin La Crosse