

# **RIVERSIDE PARK – RECOMMENDED POLICY PROPOSAL**

**Prepared for the Board of Park Commissioners of La Crosse & the City of  
La Crosse Parks Department  
La Crosse, WI**

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## **Introduction**

This report is a summation of research into park policy, to inform the Board of Park Commissioners on how to proceed with implementing policy and ordinances within the La Crosse park system with a particular emphasis on Riverside Park, compiled by Kit Kirsch from January to May 2024. The following individuals were involved in the formulation of recommended policy:

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## **A) Goal and Priorities**

This report analyzes the ordinances and policies that affect Riverside Park, and the sites and statues that exist or have existed within Riverside Park. This report presents the Board of Park Commissioners with policies, ordinances, sites, and statues that should be added, improved upon, preserved, or removed, based on John Nolen's park philosophy.

The main parks that should be affected are Riverside Park and Copeland Park, as the main two river front parks in the city, but as Nolen designed Riverside as just one in a large system of parks within La Crosse, an argument can be made to extend many of these ordinances and policies to also include the smaller parks. See Definitions in the Appendix for park specifications.

## **B) History**

**Part I: The Ho-Chunk** | The Ho-Chunk have historically seen the land where three rivers meet as neutral ground. In the larger La Crosse area, we have archaeological evidence of Ho-Chunk settlement and pre-historic Native American settlement, and artifacts from more recent settlement, long considered to be the site of Nathan Myrick's original log cabin, where he traded fur and other supplies with Ho-Chunk living in the area and other travelers.

The City bought the land that is now called Myrick Park from Fanny Strasberger in 1873, and it was previously used as fairgrounds. In the early 1900s, there was discussion on what to rename it. One of the suggestions was "The Mounds", after the four effigy mounds in the area. The Turtle mound and one of the three conical mounds were reconstructed after amateur archaeologists excavated them. Pieces of ceramic pottery indicated they were built and used ca. 700 – 1100 CE. Ultimately, it was formally renamed Myrick Park on July 31, 1904.

Red Cloud Park is also the original land of a Ho-Chunk band. After the Battle of Bad Ax, Chief Black Hawk came to the area, and Chief Decorah took him to Fort Crawford where he officially surrendered. The city bought the land in 1950, and it was dedicated as a park in 1957. Ho-Chunk leaders like Alvin Blackdeer and local historians argued in favor of naming it after the Ho-Chunk. It was named after Corporal Mitchell Red Cloud Jr., a Medal of Honor recipient who fought in the Korean War.

The United States government gained this land through a treaty signed with Ho-Chunk members who didn't have the authority to do so, and began removing the Ho-Chunk after eight months despite the treaty officially giving them eight years. They were eventually forcibly removed to Crow Creek Reserve in Nebraska. The area where Spence Park currently stands is the historic location of the steamboat landing where the U.S. army troops forced Ho-Chunk families onto steamboats to take them to guarded reservations.

The Ho-Chunk in Wisconsin were known as the Wisconsin Winnebago Tribe until 1993, and are currently known as the Ho-Chunk Nation. They currently own non-continuous lands in fourteen counties in Wisconsin and some land in Illinois. There are approximately 200 fluent Ho-Chunk language speakers, with efforts being made to maintain the language. Their government is at

Black Rivers Falls, and there is a branch office in La Crosse within the Three Rivers House. According to the 2016 census, there are over 8,000 Ho-Chunk living in Wisconsin (about 230 in La Crosse County alone), and the number is only increasing.

**Part II: Riverside Park** | The land that is currently Riverside Park was made by dredging the Mississippi for sand. Originally, the waterline was close to the buildings of early Prairie La Crosse, which was what La Crosse was originally named. The shoreline was ragged and irregular, and people moving from boats to the shoreline often found it difficult to judge the distance and traverse the large rocks that were on the shore. The land was made right off Spence Park, the area of which is circled in [Exhibit 1](#).

The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Co. had a quit-claim deed of the entire strip (around 12 acres) wanted for Riverside Park, dating from 1876. It was known as the Topliff strip, or Topliff Tract. Other private owners and smaller companies lived and worked on 2/3 of this land. In 1898, the City took a 5-year lease of the land in exchange for a strip of land 30-feet-wide running alongside the Levee tracks. Due to this lease, the City couldn't contest the title on grounds of adverse possession.

Eventually, the City gained the land by condemning the private owners' land for park purposes, paying them \$4 (around \$130 in 2024), and quit-claimed certain streets and alleys in the area to the Railway Company. In exchange for the extension of park limits, the City changed the grade of streets and allowed the Railway Company to lay more tracks.

The Board of Park Commissioners were considering John Nolen as a park designer as early as 1908, and by 1911, Nolen presented his design. By spring 1912, seeding and trees were being planted in Riverside Park. Early work on creating Riverside Park can be seen in [Exhibit 6](#), and further pictures of the completed Riverside in 1911, 1912, and 1914 can be seen in [Exhibits 7, 8, and 10](#).

Nolen planned La Crosse's whole park system, intending to create more parks within La Crosse and connect all of them through a system of parkways, paths, and boulevards. He also planned out several state parks throughout Wisconsin. World War I affected finances, however, and the plan was never fully implemented. The original plan can be seen in [Exhibit 5](#), and Riverside Park's layout as of 2022 in [Exhibit 12](#).

The Spence Park Wall was constructed approximately around 1898. It is the potential location of Myrick's original cabin. The area has also served as the main steamboat and ferry landing in La Crosse throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as seen in [Exhibit 2](#) and [Exhibit 3](#). The World War Veteran's Monument was originally for World War I veterans, and was originally located in City Hall, but was moved into Riverside in 1918. A pergola was donated to the City in 1920 for installation in Riverside. The United States Fish Control Laboratory was added in 1924. The Anderson Memorial Bandstand was added in 1930 in honor of Mayor Dr. Anderson, with an addition in 1985, a reconstruction in 2013, and separate rehabilitation of the base and bandshell in 2019-2021.

The Hiawatha Statue, also known as the Big Indian, was added to Riverside in 1961. Restrooms were added in 1979. In 2021, the Friends of Riverside Park funded upgrades to the North restroom, and the South restroom was rebuilt in 2022-2023. The Hoeschler Fountain was constructed in 1981. The Eagle Sculpture was added in 1986. The first garden starting the Riverside International Friendship Gardens was made in 2006, and the same year, the “A Simpler Time” statue was added to Riverside Park. In 2023, the south Riverside Veterans’ Monument was added near the Mississippi Levee. There are various memorial benches located throughout Riverside Park, and five rentable zones throughout the park.

Riverside Park currently hosts events such as Riverfest, Moon Tunes, and the Rotary Lights. The park has walking/running trails, and walkways throughout or leading up to the park, like the Pearl Street Walkway, the Main Street Civic Center Plaza, and the State Street riverfront boardwalk.

The Board of Park Commissioners discussed putting up a wall along the west and south sides of the river front in 1904. This barrier did not come to fruition, and the riverfront area was open with an embankment leading down to the river. In 1991, there was talk about constructing a boardwalk in Riverside Park. The proposed boardwalk was unpopular with the public, the Department of Natural Resources, and the La Crosse Common Council.

Originally, a wooden boardwalk was suggested, with boat slips and fishing piers. The La Crosse County Board of Harbor Commissioners worried about the boat slips for safety reasons, and the public felt the permit to construct the boardwalk would commercialize Riverside Park and negatively affect its aesthetic. The La Crosse Queen worried the boardwalk with boat slips would negatively affect their ability to dock. Permission was eventually granted to create a boardwalk, but without the boat slips.

In 2007, gates, rails, and chains were added to the boardwalk to keep people from falling into the river, after the drownings of two inebriated college students.

There are seasonal boats docks currently in Riverside Park, known as the Riverside Transient Docks, to support the expanding cruise industry. The American Queen Steamboat Company, American Cruise Lines, Julie Belle Swain Restaurant Ship, Columbus Foundation, the La Crosse Queen, Columbus Foundation, Viking Cruises, and other transient users all dock off Riverside Park. Most are cruises designed to look like historical steamboats. The La Crosse Queen in particular has been in operation since 1976, and is permanently docks at Riverside Park.

The first Oktoberfest was dedicated in 1961 alongside the installation of the Hiawatha Statue in Riverside Park. Riverfest began in 1983, and has consistently taken place in Riverside Park. Rotary Lights began in 1995. Rotary’s Moon Tunes concert series began in 2012. Other bands often perform in the Bandshell, like the La Crosse Concert Band and the La Crosse Jazz Orchestra.

Sections of the park are locally and historically designated historic sites. The park was recommended but not designated, as the design the original planner, John Nolen, made wasn’t implemented fully enough. The U.S. Fish Control Laboratory is nationally and locally listed.

Riverside Park was found to not be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) twice, in 1996 and 2017, but it is locally registered.

**Part III: Urban Planning** | Urban planning in the United States began with Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and Calvert Vaux’s design for Central Park in New York City. It was implemented in 1858. Progressivism (See [Appendix: Definitions](#)) grew large in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Progressives wanted to reform society (i.e., the home, politics, poverty, gender relations, and more) by increasing morality and a sense of civic duty in the population.

Olmsted Sr. believed in nature’s restorative qualities and “democratic ideals”, but he also privileged certain ideals and users over others even in the design of the park. He had an extensive code of behavior for the park, with rules against things like picnics, walking on grass, and “strenuous activity”. The land itself had issues in its founding, as well; Central Park was seized from squatters, Black Americans, and immigrant homesteaders, who all faced limited alternatives. This issue is also seen in the creation of Michigan Central Station and Roosevelt Park, where the Corktown residents were forced out of their homes to use the land for a railroad station and park, and to keep travelers arriving in Detroit from seeing the working-class community as they arrived.

The City Beautiful Movement existed largely in the 1890s and very early 1900s, and was a movement that combined progressivism with urban space. Supporters believed that space could shape human behavior and interaction, and that by creating aesthetically beautiful green spaces, they could create a more moral and healthier society. Parks were meant to be an escape from the city, from within the city. Those without the means to leave the city frequently would have a place to destress and relax, and those with the means to would have a place to promenade their wealth. These green spaces were designed to lead to better health and crime reduction.

This movement didn’t exist within a vacuum; many were, in part, related to the increased industrialization of the United States. Factory smog was prevalent in larger cities, with fewer labor and environmental laws than exist today. High poverty, sickness, and immigration rates, as well as the increasing mechanization of the nation, heightened these concerns.

The City Practical and City Beautiful movements often are put at odds with one another due to their differing perspectives on city planning, but they were historically more intertwined than not. The City Practical grew in response to the City Beautiful, and saw the ideology of the City Beautiful as the idolization of superficial beauty. Some saw the ostentatious displays to be at odds with the general public interacting with them, and more fitting for the genteel Gilded Age (ca. 1880-1900).

“Beauty” and “usefulness” have historically been linked, stemming from Socrates’ statement that if something is useful, then it is beautiful. American architectural critic F.W. Fitzpatrick saw beauty through “natural, logical, direct, refined, and sane” designs. This led city planners towards what Arnold Brunner called “beautility” in his 1911 speech to the American Civil Association. “Beautility”, by his definition, was combining beauty and utility to create an aesthetically pleasing but overall incredibly practical community.

Using practicality to induce beauty was incredibly prevalent in the city planning movement past 1910. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., for example, is famously quoted with saying, “Its aim is efficiency; its measure economy, its outcome beauty.” The beauty was thought to be the result of good planning. If something was beautiful, it was *because* it was well planned.

John Nolen helped found the Harvard School of Planning in 1929, and was on the original faculty. It closed in 1936, and within the same year, modernist architect Walter Gropius founded the Graduate School of Landscape Design, and redefined city planning. Nolen taught town planning with the idea that cities were biological organisms. Gropius, on the other hand, designed buildings as cost-effectively as possible, and aimed to connect form and function, leaning further into the City Practical philosophy.

Both of the World Wars saw the decline of interest in funding urban planning projects in their aftermath. After World War II, city planning was largely regulated to traffic engineering and public works. Parks also gained a reputation for criminal activity, so security features were added to be seen as safe. These features also helped police the community and suppress activity the community saw as undesirable. Parks grew away from the City Beautiful ideology of parks as spaces for leisure and peaceful contemplation into places for physical activity to keep youth from delinquency and crime.

In the 1970s, there was an architectural and aesthetic “renaissance”, and parks began to be seen as a way to reinvigorate their surrounding community. Around the same time, coinciding with the civil rights movement, leisure justice research also began to grow. Leisure research has shown that green spaces can help with mental restoration, stress reduction, and social cohesion.

These green spaces can be a doubled-edged sword, however; through policy, Cities can communicate who they believe their community to be, and who they see as “belonging” in their green spaces.

Lawrence Halprin designed Denver’s Skyline Park as part of Denver’s 1950s revitalization plan. He practiced collaborative planning, where he’d poll broad swaths of community members to see what they valued. The park was also supposed to be financially conducive by attracting stores, shoppers, and tourists, so people would be more willing to fund its creation. Halprin wanted the park to be a democratic space similar to these urban planners from the early 1900s. Use of the park declined in the 1980s, and it was eventually remodeled after lack of maintenance and too many “undesirables” using the space.

New Urbanism as a movement was founded in 1993 by a number of architects, urban designers, and planners who were frustrated with the way cities were being developed. The movement believes that environment has a direct impact on quality of life, and as such, a community should be well-designed and well-maintained. There is an emphasis placed on the conservation of natural environments and the creation of mixed-use, walkable communities.

Seaside, Florida is perhaps the best-known New Urbanist work; it was founded by Robert and Daryl Davis, and designed by Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Andrés Duany. The design was inspired from John Nolen’s work, and is best remembered for its quick bounce-back from

Hurricane Opal in 1995, where it came through almost unscathed and was operating normally within days of the hurricane. This is credited to its strict construction codes and its location behind the natural beach dune system.

Laurie Olin's 1995 Hermann Park plan for Houston and James Corner's 2006 the High Line plan for New York City both emphasized their wish for the spaces to be democratic, socially just, and equitable places. Corner also recognizes that architecture and city planning can't be the end all to be all, and that other social justice must be done as well.

In 2016, members of the Landscape Architecture Foundation gathered to create a modern declaration, specifically pointing out how landscape architects can address issues like climate change and systemic and accelerating inequity through aesthetic and practical designs. Specifically, their intended end goals were equity, sustainability, resiliency, and democracy.

The City Beautiful Movement focused largely on civic duty and increasing morality among the population (specifically the lower-classes), while more recent urban planners focus on social justice, equity, and democracy. The underlying base of wishing for democracy remain the same, but how planners contemplate on and implement these goals have changed with popular societal discourse. This also shows how American values have changed slightly over time, with our focus now largely being on the appearance of equity.

Many urban planners, like James Corner, also recognize that creating green spaces and parks and saying they were made to be democratic doesn't make the space equal for all. He recognizes the need for green spaces to be a piece of a larger systemic push for equality and social justice, instead.

**Part IV: The City Planner, John Nolen** | The La Crosse city park system was designed by John Nolen, an urban planner, in 1911. He designed concepts for both Riverside Park and Copeland Park, as well. In 1919, he was rehired to survey the city for a war memorial location.

Nolen became interested in urban planning during a trip to Europe. He specifically pointed out Germany and Switzerland's city planning as some of his influences. He enjoyed the green spaces, the public transportation, and the architectural design. Nolen believed that to improve urban life, you had to invest in the public good and green spaces.

Nolen may have publicly been considered to be tied to the City Beautiful Movement, but he always designed his parks and cities in a simpler manner than other City Beautiful enthusiasts. He focused more on the design and function of an area, ensuring the areas were walkable, clean, and well-designed over gaudier architectural monuments and sites. He worried that too expensive of a space would alienate the people living in the area, so his plans didn't lean on architectural wonders but on how open and accessible the spaces were for *everyone*.

When Nolen designed Riverside Park in 1911, he was still a relatively new urban planner. He returned to La Crosse in 1919 to survey the city to help decide where to place a war memorial, and ended up creating several maps that still exist in the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse's



Murphy Special Collections. His map of the building distribution in La Crosse in 1919 shown in Exhibit 11, effectively showing how the City implemented his plan.

We can see his plan for the La Crosse park system in Exhibit 4: a green city, with trees dotting the streets and squares, and parkways connecting all of the parks in the city. Riverside was designed to be a series of wide-open lawns with walkways surrounded by trees in between them, with an open shoreline that allowed an intimate connection to the river (See Exhibit 5). Many of his walkways are surrounded by trees, to both create an aesthetically pleasing look as well as provide shade. Riverside Park was designed to be more ornamental than Copeland Park, with Copeland Park being more functional.

Whenever Nolen created a city plan, he always specifically pointed out what areas of nature around the city he wanted to highlight through his plan. In La Crosse, he intended for the river and bluffs to be included in all park plans and forms of recreation. In St. Petersburg, Florida, that was the Pinellas Peninsula's natural coastal marshes, brackish wetlands, and barrier islands, the highlight of which was a mile-long undeveloped barrier island. These areas also provided the city with natural barriers to help it withstand hurricanes and other storms.

He proposed a tramline to run from the island to the mainland, and a streetcar line to link the tram to a retail and hotel district, and this configuration to extend to the rest of the city. Through this, he planned walkable, mixed-use neighborhood centers to mitigate traffic problems and optimize land use. This proposal also aided with his belief in affordable housing. He noted in 1934 that housing, food, and clothing were seen as public functions in Europe but not the United States, and this combined with private entities want for private capital created a lack of low-cost housing in the United States. He believed that, with accessible public transportation, families would have more income to spend on housing rather than maintaining cars.

Nolen was a massive advocate for the English Garden City. These were characterized largely with pedestrian-scaled neighborhoods, a public transit system, greenbelts, and urban centers. He tended to design cities that connected to other cities through parkways, with farmland in between.

Nolen and Lewis Mumford began exchanging letters in 1923. Mumford worked deeply with sustainability within urban planning, and he and Nolen shared similar ideas on how urban planning should be designed and implemented. Both believed in shaping cities for the natural environment, rather than changing the environment for cities. Both believed that increasing urban spaces in cities would help their citizens, and limit damage to the environment. In particular, Mumford believed in green, human-scaled cities without the encroach of machinery into daily life.

Nolen died in 1937. His planning company had been affected by the end of World War I as well as the Great Depression, and by the end of his life, he was largely taking private commissions or teaching. He is credited with coining the concept and title of city planning, and his most notable designs are Venice, Florida and Mariemont, Ohio.

Nolen's St. Petersburg, Florida plan was originally rejected in 1923 for its lack of potential real estate opportunities, but the city ended up adopting limits on dredging and filling the harbor in the 1970s and a plan for a more pedestrian-oriented and ecologically balanced city, similar to his original plan.

Overall, while Nolen's earliest plans may have followed the more popular City Beautiful thought at the time, his planning quickly moved further into creating functional, sustainable spaces as he grew in his craft.

### **C) Current Policy & Sites**

#### **Current Ordinances:**

##### **Sec. 2-447. – Control of parks by Board.**

This ordinance gives the Board of Park Commissioners the power to control all the City-owned land for parks, boulevards, pleasure drives, swimming pools, and any land that is acquired or designated as such. City-owned land shall be free to everyone, but the Board may require charges for the use of facilities, subject to occasional rules and regulations.

##### **Sec. 4-182. - Picnics and gatherings.**

Indoor picnics/gatherings must have suitable exits and open spaces for the anticipated attendance, with adequate sanitary facilities. Service of beverages must be supervised by someone properly licensed under Sec. 4-110. For gatherings over 100, the licensee must supervise identification to ensure minors are not in attendance. Alcoholic beverages must be served in disposable containers. Outdoor picnics/gatherings are permitted with a temporary Class B license in Carroll Park, Copeland Park, Riverside Park, Houska Park, Cameron Park, Myrick Park, Veteran's Freedom Park, Pettibone Park except the beach area, Black River Beach except the beach area, Green Island Park, Erickson Fields, Upper Hixon Park and Burns Park. Restrooms exist at each park but the licensee must have temporary facilities as well. Areas where alcoholic beverages are served must be full enclosed with a clearly defined entrance and exit when attendance may draw 200 or more people.

Sec. 4-182 (b)(6) specifies that the cost of either or both damaged public property or required cleanup can be invoiced to the applicant.

##### **Sec. 34-55. – Destruction of Property.**

No person shall in any manner deface or injure any building, tree, shrub, plant or other property, or trespass through shrubbery borders or other plantations or upon any premises under the jurisdiction of the Board of Park Commissioners.

##### **Sec. 34-61. - Littering prohibited.**

No person shall throw, deposit, or leave any paper, article or thing except in the receptacles provided for waste.

##### **Sec. 34-68. – Use of off-the-road vehicles, electric personal assistive mobility devices (EPAMDs), motorcycles, trail bikes or mountain bikes prohibited.**

This ordinance bans EPAMDs on sidewalks in Riverside Park International Gardens, Granddad's Park; bicycle paths at the Upper and Lower Hixon Forests and Forest Hills Golf Course; pedestrian paths at the Granddads Mezzanine, Riverside Park levee, and Riverside

Park boardwalk; city owned Stewardship property under Department of Natural Resources contract or Mississippi Valley Conservancy easement; fishing piers or boat docks; park property under a rental agreement or lease agreement; or any playfield, open grass area or sports field on any property under the jurisdiction of the Board of Park Commissions. Prohibitions in this section are said to not apply to persons using an EPAMD due to a disability in accordance to the ADA.

**Sec. 34-69. - Ultralight aircraft regulated.**

This ordinance bans the use of ultralight aircrafts, vehicles, or hang gliders within the City within a manner that endangers or injures people or property. They are not allowed in parks without a permit. A fee is not allowed to be charged by the Board of Park Commissioners for the permit, which may be issues for a period up to 30 days, and the Board is not allowed to sponsor the activity either.

**Sec. 34-142. - Authority of Director of Parks and Recreation.**

This section is under [Article V. – Trees on Public Property](#). The **Director of Parks and Recreation**, subject to the supervision and control of the Board of Park Commissioners, **shall have exclusive jurisdiction, authority, control, supervision and direction over all trees, shrubs and plants, planted or growing in or upon** the public highways and **public places of the City and the planting, removal, care, preservation, protection, removal and control thereof**. The Director of Parks and Recreation is empowered to plant, transplant, remove, trim, spray and otherwise care for and protect all trees and shrubs on or in that part of every street, the grade of which has been established, between the lot line and the curb and on the center or side plots of all boulevards and parkways and in all public parks or grounds belonging to the City and the control of such planting, removing, trimming, spraying, or other work by others. In discharging these duties the Director of Parks and Recreation shall be designated City Forester and shall be governed by the provisions of Wis. Stat. § 27.09.

**Sec. 34-143. - Damage to trees.**

This section is under [Article V. – Trees on Public Property](#). It states that no person shall destroy or deface any tree or part of a tree, or injure any shrub or plant upon the public highways **or places of the City; nor shall any chemical be used for the control of insects or other diseases, or for any other reason, nor shall any person permit any chemical, either solids or fluids, to seep, drain or be emptied on** or about any tree, shrub, or plant growing on any public highway or place within the City with permission from the Director of Parks and Recreation. No person is allowed to hitch any animals to any tree or shrub, or fasten any wire, chain, rope, or cables for anchorage, or in any way fasten any card, sign, poster, board, or any other article to any public tree, shrub, or plant.

**Sec. 34-144. - Regulations for planting and care of trees.**

This section is under [Article V. – Trees on Public Property](#). It states, in part, that if a tree is planted within three feet of a cut down tree stump, the stump must be entirely removed. Oak and elm tree pruning is allowed from April 1 to November 1, but the painting and water-proofing of pruning cuts are prohibited outside that. Good soil must be provided, and where soil is too poor to ensure growth, an amount equal to 27 cubic feet minimum must be provided for the tree hole. Planting between curb and sidewalks are prohibited. **No tree shall be planted within six feet from utilities, or nearer than two feet from the curb line or outer line of the sidewalks**

**unless special permission is granted by the Board of Park Commissioners. All trees must be planted in line with each other as established by the Board of Park Commissioners.** A list of approved tree varieties is provided in Section E: List of Acceptable Trees on Boulevards; a list of prohibited tree varieties is also provided in the ordinances. **The Board of Park Commissioners are also allowed to establish other regulation deemed necessary to insure safety or to preserve the symmetry and beauty of any public place.**

**Sec. 34-147. - Permits.**

This section is under Article V. – Trees on Public Property. It prohibits any person to plant or cause any tree, shrub, or plant to be planted in or upon any part of any public highway, park, or public place without written permission. **Said permission shall describe the work to be done, and the size, variety, and location of each tree. After the receipt of such an application, the Director of Parks and Recreation or representative shall investigate the locality where the trees, shrubs or plants are to be placed and shall grant a permit only if, in the Director's judgment the location is such as to permit the normal growth and development of each tree. Such permit shall specify the location, variety and grade of each tree and method of planting, including among other things the supplying of suitable soil. The permit shall be good only for the season stated in the same, in the year issued and no charge shall be made for the same. Before any permit shall be issued for planting more than 25 trees on any one permit, the Park Director may request from the applicant a detailed declaration of intentions either in the form of a planting plan or written statement in duplicate.** All planting plans shall show accurately the proposed street width, the location of every proposed and existing tree, the variety of each proposed and existing tree, the distance between trees in any one row, and the nature of the soil in the proposed area. All statements filed in lieu of a planting plan shall contain the same information as required on the plan. Any tree, shrub, or plant in any public place in the City shall not be trimmed, pruned, removed, maimed, treated, sprayed, dusted, fertilized, braced, or cut without written permission, who shall issue the permit if the work is necessary and the proposed workmanship is satisfactory.

**Department Policies:**

**Art Donation Policy:** The link for the art donation guidelines is [here](#). In terms of policy, it states that the City encourages donations that advances the City as a cultural destination, that donations can be accepted from both public and private sources, that donations will be considered for all parks except those where human activity is discourages, and that maintenance, installation feeds, endowments, and insurance are on a case-by-case basis.

**Donation Form:** The link for the project, park, and program donation form is [here](#). It is a short form, listing the donation amount, donor information, and desired project/park/program information.

**Fundraising or Charging Admission in City Parks & Facilities:** This policy discusses certain events that need Park Board approval to use a City park, park shelter, or park facility. They need to submit a letter of request to the Department of Parks & Recreation prior to the Park Board meeting; also listed are the requirements the letter of request must have.

**Payment Policy:** All fees must be paid in full at the time of registration or reservation, and are processed on a first-come, first-serve basis.

### Sites and Statues:

#### Anderson Memorial Bandstand, 1930; 1985 addition; 2013 reconstruction; 2019-2021 construction.

The bandstand was originally erected in Riverside in memory of Dr. Anderson, who created the Park Commission with the intent of a La Crosse park system, in 1930. The bandshell was designed by local architect Otto Merman and constructed by T.J. Molzahn Co. The bandstand gained an addition in 1985. It was reconstructed in 2013, and has undergone construction from 2019-2021, reopening publicly in 2021.

There were renovations in 1962, 1978, and 1986. In 2019, a raised stage was constructed on the bandstand along with added foundation work for the weight. A canopy was constructed in 2019 and 2020 and opened in 2021. There have been some issues with the canopy since its completion, with significant deflections, excessive settlement, and several checks and splits in all the members.

There used to be regular bands playing for the community, and a specific fund for hiring them. In particular, Dr. Anderson's son John donated \$25,000 to the City, with \$15,000 going to the construction of the bandshell and the remaining \$10,000 going to the Riverside Park Entertainment Fund. Much thought was put into how many physical seats should be in the area: too many, and smaller groups would feel isolated, and too few, and larger groups wouldn't be able to use the area. A medium amount of seating was decided upon, with places strategically located through the area for people to sit if more seating was needed.

#### "A Simpler Time" Children & Dog Statue, 2006; 2009.

The "A Simpler Time" statues were dedicated in 2006. It was originally of two life-size bronze children, and a dog named Fido was added in 2009. Its creation was guided by the La Crosse City Vision Foundation, and designed by local artist Mike Martino. The sculpture was inspired from a photograph by Theresa Smerud, also a La Crosse native. The plaza leading up to the sculpture has bricks with contributor names on them.

#### Eagle Sculpture, 1986.

The eagle sculpture was designed by Racine native Elmer Petersen. He attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison for his Master's degree, taught art for nineteen years elsewhere, and then returned to the La Crosse area, moving to Onalaska. He also created the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse's eagle at the top of their Veteran's memorial arch. He was commissioned by the City of La Crosse but had to fund the creation of the statue himself. The funds for the commission came from a private source; he originally planned to raise \$55,000 to create the statue, but lowered it to \$50,000. The eagle's tree trunk was planned to be thirty feet tall, with the eagle being eight feet tall with a wingspan of twenty feet.

Originally, when the Board of Park Commissioners were considering accepting the donation, they were conflicted over the sculpture's 99-year provision but ended up accepting it. Jurisdiction and maintenance were under control of the Board of Park Commissioners.

Vandalization and replacement weren't included in the Park Board's maintenance responsibility, as insurance would cover that. The Board recommended the resolution to be amended to add a special fund specifically for project maintenance.

#### Hiawatha Statue, 1961.

The Hiawatha Statue was commissioned by an unnamed group of civic leaders in the late 1950s, and was created by Anthony Zimmerhagl and his sons over four years. It was moved into Riverside in October 1961 to be dedicated as part of the first Oktoberfest. The statue had to be repaired every couple of decades, and according to Park Director Robert Berg, the city repainted it every couple of years for about \$3,000. In the early 2000s, restoration costs were estimated to be about \$50,000 by city officials.

The Publicity Committee wanted to connect La Crosse to the starting point of the Hiawatha Valley through renaming the Big Indian "Hiawatha". Members of both the Ho-Chunk and the historical committee of Outdoors Unlimited argued against this name, as it would be inauthentic to the history of the area, and as such, damage the city's heritage.

Every time discussion came up about whether to renovate this statue, talk came up about removing it from the park. Each time, Ho-Chunk community members (like Chief Alvin Blackdeer, Dan Green, and Kera Cho Mani) discussed the ahistorical and racist nature of the statue, while white community members like Donald Johnson wanted the statue to stay for its historical significance and connection to local sculptor Anthony Zimmerhagl.

The statue was removed in 2020.

#### "Hoeschler" Fountain, 1981.

The fountain was constructed using marble donated by the Hoeschler family, from a stairwell in the old Court House. Flowers are planted in the area around it, with benches for seating. The fountain was updated by Jake Hoeschler's son, Jay, in collaboration with the City and HSR Architects in 2003 to create a more substantial fountain due to deterioration. The fountain has become a wedding and prom destination. In 2019, the fountain was updated with more permanent materials.

#### La Crosse Queen River Boat, Shelter and Dock.

The La Crosse Queen has been in operation since 1976. She was based off the grand river boats from the early 1900s, and is one of the few authentic paddlewheel boats still in operation in the United States. Riverside Park holds a shelter and dock specifically for her. The La Crosse Queen is permanently docked in Riverside Park.

#### Memorial pavers.

There are currently memorial bricks by the Spence Park historical marker, the Veterans' monument near the Mississippi Levee, and within the Riverside International Friendship Gardens. The La Crosse City Vision Foundation offers memorial bricks for individuals, families, or businesses. As of 2024, the bricks are planned to be used to construct a plaza around the Veterans' Memorial in south Riverside Park.

#### Moon Tunes.

Rotary Moon Tunes began in 2012 by Terry Bauer, with the Valley View Rotary Club. It was originally named Noon Tunes and ran from 11:30 to 1:30pm. The event started as a way to offer a free concert while raising donations and awareness of the bandshell renovations and larger Riverside Park area. The original Noon Tunes had issues, like a transient lunch crowd and lack of sun protection, and due to the event time, the performers also had to work at their day jobs. The performers asked to move the event to Thursday evenings rather than Wednesday afternoons, and the crowd began to grow. Moon Tunes features local musicians, and still offers the opportunity to donate to the park by Rotarians.

#### Pergola, 1920.

Local seed merchant commissioner J.P. Salzer donated the Pergola to the City in 1920 for installation in Riverside. The President of the Board of Park Commissioners moved the motion and it was seconded by Mr. Moll to accept, and express their appreciation on behalf of the City. The pergola originally located on the north end of Riverside Park, near the northmost circular walkway. It was permanently removed in 2015.

#### Restrooms, 1979; 2021-2023 reconstruction

The restrooms in Riverside Park were erected in 1979. In 2021, the Friends of Riverside Park funded \$80,000 worth of upgrades to the North restrooms, including making them ADA compliant and adding heating. In 2022-2023, the South restrooms were rebuilt.

#### Remaining Spence Park Wall.

The Spence Park Wall was constructed around 1898. The area was the potential location of Myrick's original cabin, the main steamboat and ferry landing throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the location where Ho-Chunk families were forced onto steamboats to be removed from Wisconsin.

#### Riverfest.

Riverfest began in 1983 as an outgrowth of previous festivals, like the La Crosse Jaycees, who would set off fireworks from Pettibone Park while spectators watched from Riverside Park. La Crosse Area Convention and Visitors Bureau President Phil Quillin suggested that a summer celebration should be established over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July to keep people in the area, and chairman of the Tourism Committee Mike Stout started preliminary talks. Eventually, "Riverfest" was decided on, as an event selling buttons, beer, and soft drinks, who'd seek donations from area businesses to help fund the festival. The event has taken place in Riverside Park since the beginning. In 1985, they requested to expand and improve upon the Riverside Park bandshell, as well as to extend the curfew during Riverfest within the park. In 1986, they requested to install a new electrical system in the park. In 1988, a five-year lease extension with Riverfest, Inc. was approved, and a long-term lease was requested in 1994.

#### Riverside International Friendship Gardens, 2006.

The Sister Cities initiative was started in 1956 by President Eisenhower to establish relationships between ordinary citizens throughout the world. Chris Hanson created the Riverside International Friendship Gardens (RIFG) after learning about how San Diego donated

a rose garden to its sister city in China. In return, the city (presumably Yantai, China) arranged a peony garden in San Diego. The first garden in La Crosse was made in 2006, honoring La Crosse's sister city Luoyang, China. The nonpartisan nonprofit's mission is to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. The initiative includes yearly exchanges in business, medicine, agriculture, and education.

Currently, there are seven gardens, dedicated to La Crosse's sister cities in China, France, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Russia, and Cameroon.

#### Riverside Transient Docks (seasonal, by south levee), 2019; 2023 levee expansion.

In 2019, the City of La Crosse installed transient boating docks, one in Riverside Park, and one in Riverside North. SmithGroup was paid \$172,000 to analyze how to implement more docking after increased demand by cruise ship companies. They were also to provide a study on the effects more cruises stopping in La Crosse would have on the environment. Former Mayor Tim Kabat stated that the cruise lines would potentially want exclusive private docking, and that the City would have to work something out, as that's not necessarily a feasible plan. Twenty-two boats were scheduled to stop in La Crosse that year, with two cancelling due to high waters. In 2023, a new seawall was added, as well as an upper walk, railing, and more stairs.

#### Rotary Lights.

Rotary Lights began in 1995, after Rotary East President Duane Moore was impressed by a college light display in Oklahoma. Rotary clubs are part of an international service organization built on providing humanitarian aid, and the Coulee region had nine clubs as of 2014. The original Rotary Lights were placed in Myrick Park, but it didn't have enough power sources, and the streets wouldn't have handled the traffic well, so it was moved to Riverside Park. It has since taken place in Riverside Park, with opportunities for donations.

#### United States Fish Control Laboratory, 1924.

About 8.25 acres were originally suggested to be bought by the U.S. government for use as a fish habitat and aquarium. During this time, over-fishing was common, and the U.S. government hoped to standardize fishing and repopulate local fish to preserve local fishing. 3.5 acres were given from the Railway Co. to the City, which the City then gave to the U.S. government, with the intent that the Administration of the Upper Mississippi River Wild Life and Fish Refuge would establish bass ponds. The City states in their resolution that if the U.S. government didn't maintain the fish hatchery and the structures on the land it owned to a similar condition as its surrounding (the park), and if the land 'wasn't used well', the title would return to the City.

Local business Hackner, Shroeder, Roslansky & Associates did the initial site study and planning when the fish hatchery was to be changed into a lab. The land was transferred from the University of Wisconsin system, who used it in their graduate programs for students, to the U.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. In 1962, the primary purpose was to research and develop ways to limit rough fish, with research done on fish toxicants and anesthetics. One notable project was on antimycin, a fish toxicant the Wisconsin alumni research foundation found. They researched chemical effects on aquatic life.



In 1981, the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The City currently is leasing the space to The Hatchery, a boutique hotel/event venue.

Veteran’s Monument (South Riverside Park), 2023.

A sculpture of a bronze eagle and U.S. flag, designed by local artist Mike Martino, was dedicated in Riverside Park in November 2023, for Veterans’ Day weekend. The monument is located near the Mississippi River levee. The official plans were announced around Veterans’ Day in 2021 and in November 2022, a year later, groundbreaking was held. The La Crosse City Vision group wanted to raise \$500,000 to fund it. The base stands on bricks with the names of the people being honored and of donors on them.

World War Veteran’s Monument, 1918.

The Spanish Cannon’s location was chosen based on Spanish-American-war-involved military companies within the city’s opinion. It was originally installed in City Hall around 1900, but was moved into the middle of the largest lawn in Riverside Park in 1918. The cannon was manufactured in 1787 and obtained by the U.S. government during the Spanish-American war, and eventually brought to La Crosse through Congressman Esch’s efforts. The cannon was originally used as a World War I memorial. In 1972, the La Crosse Muzzleloaders, Inc. wanted to fire the cannon. The Muzzleloader’s President, James G. Eide, argued that the cannon was in great condition and wouldn’t be degraded by firing it, and that it should be fired every Fourth of July. The City Parks Department refused.

The cannon currently stands on the westmost side of the park across from its original installation point.

**D) Recommendations**

Ordinance/Policy Recommendation:

See Appendix for links to the City Municipal Codes.

Sec. 2-447 discusses administrator control over City parks. It currently only specifies charges for use of facilities, and that they are subject to occasional rules and regulations. Many other cities (like Minneapolis, MN; Edgar, WI; Linden, WI; Medford, WI; and Park Rapids, MN) all have authorities written into their ordinances that allow them to adopt specific momentary rules and regulations that shall be in full force and effect after adoption, that the City Council or Park Director can, at any time or interval of time or to certain uses, close any park or portion of a park to the public for as long as they deem reasonably necessary. The Park Board is also permitted to revoke or overrule park permits if deemed necessary. Due to this precedence of larger Park Board authority in other cities, an addition should be considered for Sec. 2-447, expanding the La Crosse Park Board’s authority officially.

Sec. 4-182(b)(6) specifies that property damages or cleanup caused by events will be invoiced to the applicant. Given the importance of maintaining green spaces so future groups will have the opportunity to benefit from access to these areas (See Section B: Urban Planning), and Nolen’s belief in maintaining green spaces for sustainability purposes (See Section B: John

Nolen), I would recommend adopting or revising an ordinance to include a cleanup/turf protection/damage protection clause notifying anyone reserving a park or section of a park that they are required to pay for any damage to the park incurred during their event. Much of this is unofficial department policy already, but having it be official would expand protections over the Department and provide an avenue for repayment if the Department ends up having to pay for cleanup. I would also recommend adding a department policy to add this to the event permit form, to be upfront about this. In congruence with Sec. 2-447 as well, permission to rent another area or the same area at a different time should be permitted to be withheld until payment is made in full.

Sec. 34-55 discusses destruction of park property. Nolen was a larger believer in maintaining natural areas and green spaces, and keeping parks as clean spaces for pedestrian use (See Section B: John Nolen). Cities like Edgar, WI; Turtle Lake, WI; Venice, FL; Park Rapids, MN; and Duluth, MN all have added turf protection ordinances that ban things like digging, excavation, and damaging any turf, sod, grass, or shrubbery in the park. Due to both these areas, I would recommend amending Sec. 34-55 or adopting a new ordinance specifically for expanded turf protections. In congruence with Sec. 2-447 and Sec. 4-182(b)(6), an addition should also be made on the event permit form for cleanup and damages payments for turf protections.

Sec. 34-61 bans littering. Due to Nolen's extreme emphasis on the river as one of the largest sources of beauty within La Crosse, this ordinance should be amended or an ordinance should be added include waterway protections, as well, like banning depositing any bottles, debris, or garbage into any body of water in or adjacent to any park. Cities like Medford, WI; Menomonie, WI; Pepin, WI; Park Rapids, MN; Le Sueur, MN; and Duluth, MN all have ordinances around waterway protections. Sec. 115-280 does have a prohibition on depositing material in navigable waters without a permit or in floodplain/floodfringe areas, but La Crosse currently doesn't have waterway protection policy in regards to prohibiting depositing garbage into bodies of water.

Sec. 34-68 is an ordinance that prohibits electric personal assistive mobility devices (EPAMDs) and other bikes and vehicles. They aren't permitted on certain sidewalks, paths, properties, grass areas, or fields, as linked in Section C: Current Ordinances. This is specified to not apply to persons using an EPAMD due to a disability in accordance to the ADA, but it is often difficult to determine whether someone has a disability solely by looking at them. This ordinance also has the potential to affect the most vulnerable people in our community in a tangibly negative way by removing their ability to be in society and lowering their quality of life, and affects many people, from disabled people to elderly people. No other city I have looked at has had an explicit park ordinance around EPAMDs, and our current ordinance speaks about our current community's values and priorities. Nolen strongly believed in community improvement through green spaces, and equality and democracy. This ordinance should be specified upon, to exclude single-person mobility device types that allow the elderly and disabled members of our community to be included in our community. According to WI statute 340.01(15pm), an EPAMD is "a self-balancing, 2-nontandem-wheeled device that is designed to transport only one person and that has an electric propulsion system that limits the maximum speed of the device to

15 miles per hour or less”. Specifying Sec. 34-68 in a similar way would help allow our vulnerable community members to be in our community while still excluding unwanted electronic devices from certain park sidewalks and paths. The existing trail system could also have an evaluation to see which trails and areas permit/deny the usage of certain devices, and where ordinances can be altered for this. For example, paths that are not ADA compliant or trails that don’t allow certain devices on them normally have explicit signage stating this. Current La Crosse ordinance states that all the prohibitions don’t apply for people using EPAMDs due to a disability, though, and elaborating further on what an EPAMD is could help the disabled and/or elderly members of our community still be able to be a part of the community, while also prohibiting unwanted device types in these areas.

Sec. 34-69 is an ordinance specifically prohibiting aircrafts, hang gliders, and the like without a permit. I would also recommend to add an ordinance prohibiting drones and airborne devices/toys from parks without permission. Cities like Edgar, WI; Turtle Lake, WI; and Minneapolis, MN all have ordinances prohibiting airborne devices without Board permission. Amending this ordinance or adding a new ordinance around drones and airborne devices without permit would serve a similar purpose to prohibiting hang gliders and aircrafts without permit.

La Crosse’s memorial program currently rests within the art donation form. Duluth, MN (linked in [Appendix](#) and in bibliography) has a memorial program I would recommend the Board of Park Commissioners use as a base when determining memorial program policy for La Crosse. Memorials should be limited to trees and benches, as they contribute to pedestrians’ leisure and to ecological sustainability. Other memorials run the risk of interfering with the greenery.

Currently, there are memorial bricks on the path leading to the “A Simpler Time” statue, around the south Veterans’ Monument, in front of Spence Park’s historical marker, and within the Riverside International Friendship Gardens, but there is limited space for adding new memorial bricks. Duluth’s memorial program allows them to reserve the right to replace old memorial bricks with new ones since they have limited spaces for new bricks, but to steer away from any potential controversy, specific memorial bricks should probably be avoided. An exception could be made for the memorial pavers connected to projects; namely, the La Crosse City Vision Foundation [offers memorial bricks to add to the projects they fund](#), with names of contributors on them. These differ from single memorial bricks placed due to the bricks being worked into the design itself. This is the same for the Riverside International Friendship Gardens, Spence Park, and the “A Simpler Time” statue’s plaza, where the names on the bricks are of contributors, not single memorial bricks. There should be a set number of phrases approved by the Park Board allowed on memorial bricks to avoid controversy, though.

I would also recommend using Nolen’s 1911 design for Levee Park (See [Exhibit 5](#)) as a base for potential tree planting areas. Nolen also helped define what trees were allowed in La Crosse’s park system, and many trees that are allowed/banned still follow his original guidelines. There is no specific, currently recognized list for the types of trees allowed/prohibited in parks, although technically, Sec. 34-144 would apply. The ordinance lists off trees allowed in

public spaces, as seen in [List of Trees in Boulevards](#) in Appendix (taken from the municipal code), but only discusses trees on boulevards. As such, what tree species are allowed in parks isn't clear. Considering the differing nature and needs of boulevards and parks, I would recommend adding a clause excluding parks from this section of tree permission/exclusions, and creating a list of approved trees for the memorial tree plantings in parks. An approved list for trees for parks may have a lot of crossover with those approved for boulevards, but due to park layout, they allow the chance for a wider variety of offered trees.

[Sec. 34-142](#), [Sec. 34-143](#), and [Sec. 34-145](#) deal with the authority of the Director of Parks and Recreation in regards to trees in public spaces. Many of these ideas can be used for the memorial policy around trees, as well. For example, the Director of Parks and Recreation has the authority to plant, remove, and decide where trees, shrubs, and other plants should be planted. For sustainability, a department policy could be added to try to use trees native to the area before using non-native ones, and taking Nolen's template for the trees in Riverside Park as seen in [Exhibit 5](#), as a base for tree planting could help include Nolen's original tree design into Riverside Park. Having clarity as to what types of trees can be placed in which spots would help maintain a nice, shaded tree line. Bench and tree placement can be requested but ultimately the final decision rests with the Park Board. Succession planting could also be looked into, to help tree placement in Riverside Park.

Duluth's policy also gives a number of pre-determined phrases allowed on memorials, which limits the chance of controversy like that in [Belle Plaine, MN](#), where a veterans' memorial with Christian imagery received attention when the Satanic Temple requested to donate their own veterans' memorial, as the first memorial was placed on public property. The City of Belle Plaine MN approved initially, but rapidly backtracked once the monuments received national attention.

The largest events that currently take place in Riverside Park are Riverfest, Moon Tunes, and Rotary Lights. Riverfest began in 1983, Rotary Lights in 1995, and Moon Tunes in 2012. All three donate to local organizations. Moon Tunes and Riverfest have contributed to Riverside Park, as well; Moon Tunes' original focus was on providing funding and awareness of the Bandshell in 2012, and Riverfest helped improve and expand upon the bandshell and electrical system in 1985. Rotary Lights has a mission of humanitarian aid, and has reported donating over a million dollars to local charities and organizations. Moon Tunes and Riverfest as events hold up better than Rotary Lights due to their positive contribution directly to the park, but Rotary Lights still positively contributes to the community.

Events like these—that bring many bodies into the park, occur consistently (in these cases, annually), and take place in a large portion of a park over several single days or multiple consecutively—should positively contribute to the maintenance and sustainability of the park they are occurring within. Parks are meant to be used, but they also have to be kept in good condition for future utilization. Large events chance upon harming park turf, with how many bodies they annually bring to the park, but they also bring in donations and encourage community participation and pride. I would recommend some sort of site analyzation to take place after multiple-day events to assess damage, and utilizing a recommendation like [Sec. 2-447's](#) to provide downtimes between large events, in case damage does occur at one of them.

Events that take place in public areas like parks should also be free for the main event. When the boardwalk railings were originally put in, discussion about the potential boat dockings worried community members who didn't want the space to become commercialized. Nolen also believed that parks are meant to be places of leisure, community growth, and equality, and providing free events in public spaces would be better than requiring payment to access an open space. Partnerships with other entities like food trucks or merch shops would be acceptable, so long as they aren't the main event. Donations can also be requested, and especially donations for the park. Through this, there would be incentive for other entities to participate in the event, while providing community members with a positive, enjoyable park experience.

The recommendations for Sec. 4-182(b)(6), Sec. 34-55, and Sec. 34-61 all have the potential to affect these events. They provide further protections to the parks, through cleanup fees, expanded turf protections, and expanded waterway pollution protection. Events taking place in the park would have to be aware of potential cleanup/damage fees as well as expanded protections. Through financial costs, events would hopefully be less willing to participate in decisions that would negatively affect the park. The proposed audio/light restriction recommendation directly below also has the potential to affect current and future events.

Based on Nolen's belief in Riverside Park as a place for leisurely pleasure (See [Section B: John Nolen](#)), an ordinance or policy should be added restricting audio and light usage. Edgar, WI; Menomonie WI; Turtle Lake WI; Park Rapids, MN; Le Sueur, MN; and Minneapolis, MN all have similar restrictions. Ideally, sound would be limited to a certain decibel past, say, 9PM, and events would be required to add explicit phrasing indicating when their event could have strobe and/or flashing lights. This also helps protect the health of the community. An addition could be made for this on the event permit. Menomonie, WI has a comprehensive audio ordinance that could be used as a template for a La Crosse ordinance.

Many other cities are also digitizing their donation forms as well, these days. I'd recommend adding an online option for donations for La Crosse, as well, for ease of access for community members. The current form (linked in [Appendix](#)) requires both printing off the form and mailing the form in, or emailing a staff member. Some cities use [Google Forms](#) for donations or event forms; the City should probably avoid Google for privacy, but a form close to it make it quicker and easier for people to donate to City projects/programs/parks.

Artwork in parks can be used to increase community participation and to beautify the park. The City of La Crosse usually receives artwork via donation rather than through commission, as seen with the pergola, the World War Veteran's Monument, the Hiawatha Statue, the Hoeschler Fountain, and the Eagle Sculpture. The current art donation policy form, as seen [here](#), provides a flexible request form, with explanations into the policy, criteria, and procedure provided. This form includes memorials under art donation. I would recommend looking at Minneapolis' Public Art program forms (links included in [Appendix](#) as well as the bibliography) for a potential base for temporary/permanent art installation program, as well as updating the current art donation program. The largest concerns in allowing art into parks should be location, maintenance, and design. Duluth, MN also has an email template (links included in

Appendix and bibliography) for their “art in parks” review process, where the proposal is reviewed by staff in multiple relevant departments on topics like if the proposal meets structural and maintenance standards, whether it enhances the park and the experience of park users, and whether there’s any missing information or concerns over this project. This template also allows staff to recommend the project to move forward, make changes before moving forward, or not move forward at all.

Collaborative planning could also assist in approving/denying a project after it is reviewed by staff. Lawrence Halprin practiced it during his design of Denver’s Skyline Park. This is meant to be a democratic process, and getting community opinion can help gauge whether or not an artwork would be wanted or appreciated by the community. Halprin surveyed members from all walks of life, from teenagers to the elderly. Places like Minneapolis MN also have a community engagement portion for artwork, as seen in the 2021 Example Proposal linked in Appendix and in the bibliography.

Most cities speak about signs in two ways: there are City-placed signs (generally educational or with park rules on them), and signs placed by non-governmental people or entities, with permission from the Park Board. Medford WI bans signs for advertising or otherwise promoting a commercial activity without a permit, with signs only being allowed when a temporary stand, booth, or other facility is permitted to be active in the park. Medford WI also limits these stands or facilities to be a part of a program or activity that doesn’t exceed three days. Menomonie WI has a similar policy, but they give the Recreation Advisory Board discretion to allow any person, organization, or corporation to advertise products and/or activities as long as they deem proper. Turtle Lake WI and Duluth MN both have policy around prohibiting bills, notices, signs, or advertisement on anything within any park, with an exception given for park regulations and other signs authorized by the Parks and Recreation Committee or Village Board. Park regulations and educational signage posted by the Parks and Recreation department would help contribute to park knowledge and safety, while signs posted by other entities run the risk of disrupting pedestrian leisure and enjoyment of parks. An exception could be made for City-sponsored events or people/entities renting an area, but consistent advertisements, bills, or other such signs shouldn’t be allowed in Riverside Park. Signage also runs risks of controversy with phrasing and topic, like Belle Plaine MN’s memorial controversy (as discussed further in memorial policy recommendation), so signage in parks should probably be limited to signs placed by the City or signs for events taking place within a rented area. Memorials would be an exception to this sort of policy, but they would need a number of set phrases, to help provide some variety while limiting the chance of controversy.

### Site Recommendation:

The “A Simpler Time” statue dedicated in 2006 and the addition made in 2009 block the view of the river from the provided benches. It is also one of the sites with memorial pavers on the plaza leading up to it, others including the south Veterans’ Monument and the Riverside International Friendship Gardens. The south Veterans’ Monument’s site is well designed, with the monument as the main attraction. Neither the “A Simpler Time” statue or the south Veterans’ Monument are overly decorated, though, which fits into Nolen’s more simplistic

design schemes. The “A Simpler Time” statue could be decided to be removed or relocated due to its positioning, but overall, the statue isn’t large enough to cause a lot of trouble with the view.

The Riverside International Friendship Gardens works within Nolen’s original philosophy in two separate ways. First, it provides a beautiful space where pedestrians can enjoy nature with benches and tables for passive recreation and community involvement. Second, the Sister Cities initiative to connect citizens throughout the world is congruent with Nolen’s personal beliefs in parks being a democratic place for everyone. The Riverside International Friendship Gardens program expands this philosophy and complements it. Riverside Park itself should keep its structural integrity, but additions to the Riverside International Friendship Gardens would fit in with Nolen’s philosophy and beautify the space, so long as the additions were contained to the north side of Riverside Park.

The Anderson Memorial Bandstand is an attractive community gathering spot in La Crosse. It is also an area that commonly gets rented by community members, and provides that revenue to the Parks Department. It does require maintenance every couple of decades, but this requirement seems justified in all the bandstand provides for the community, both in the past and present. Ideally, thought would be put into how to best reconstruct the bandstand to require the least amount of intrusion in the green spaces around it as possible. It should also go above and beyond ADA standards. A potential suggestion would be to include more trees in the spaces around the bandstand. Originally, Nolen designed the bandstand to be blanketed by trees (See [Exhibit 5](#)). This was to provide privacy for both pedestrians and the people utilizing the bandstand. More trees would also potentially allow for larger groups to enjoy the bandstand as well, with more shaded spaces.

The Eagle Sculpture and Hoeschler Fountain are placed in naturally flowing spaces within Riverside Park, and as such, fit in and add to the community. The Hoeschler Fountain and restrooms both fall within the definition of neighborhood parks provided by the Department of City Planning with Candeub, Fleissig and Associates. They also allow for people of all ability types to enjoy the park (as do good sidewalks/parkways and having plenty of benches). A fountain also provides relaxing leisure for citizens of the community, and allows for passive recreation.

The River Boat, Shelter, and Dock perhaps provide more culturally than to the aesthetic of Riverside, but they do provide spaces for pedestrians to sit and participate in the community. The spaces do interfere with the La Crosse community from connecting directly to the river, but so do the fences and links around the river keeping people from falling in, so that’s not the largest concern to have. Future renovation of the shelter and dock should keep the park’s important aesthetic and historical significance in mind. Riverside Transient Docks and the levee expansions have discussed expanding into Riverside Park before, but the idea was dismissed due to the cost of moving statues already in the area. Future expansion should keep potential environmental impact at the forefront, as Nolen saw the river as one of the attractions of Riverside Park when designing it, and sustainability should be considered to best preserve the area for future generations to enjoy.

Spence Park is currently under purview of Riverside Park. It has its own importance in La Crosse's history, remembering the forced removal of Ho-Chunk families from its docks as well as its position as the first step of white settlers taking over Ho-Chunk land in La Crosse. The land is closely connected to Riverside Park and has been since Riverside Park's creation, but there have been efforts made to separate them, like Spence Park's wall, which is currently overgrown. The area is largely unused, as well. I would recommend delineating clearly between it and Riverside Park in future dealings, and collaborating with Ho-Chunk members of our community, like branch at the Three Rivers House, to decide what should be allowed or not allowed in this area. I would also recommend creating a path or site between Riverside Park and Spence Park, to indicate the parks' boundaries. There is also a historical marker in Spence Park, written by local historian Myer Katz, and placed in 1978 by the Wisconsin Historical Society. This marker may be significant to members of the La Crosse community, but it is not the most accurate marker, and for that reason, I would recommend collaborating with Ho-Chunk members of our community to decide what to do with the marker, whether that be remove the current one and replace it with a more accurate one, or place another marker beside it with a more accurate history on it. There is also a time capsule at the foot of the marker, and memorial pavers with contributors' names around the time capsule. The time capsule was placed for La Crosse's sesquicentennial anniversary in 2006, and is planned to be opened in 2056. Time capsules aren't necessarily foreign additions to parks, especially for large celebrations, and as is, the Spence Park time capsule probably isn't going to be removed for some time. More memorial pavers probably shouldn't be added, keeping the proposed memorial policy in mind, but discussion with Ho-Chunk members of the community should had as to what to do with the site, whether that be to keep it the same, change it, or add to it.

The U.S. Fish Control Laboratory is a historically significant building, as one of the few remaining original fish labs. It does not fit into Nolen's original philosophy currently in its capacity as an event venue, but a justification could be made for its original construction due to its work as a fish habitat and fish lab. In order to continue this justification, ideally whatever the Fish Control Lab's land is used for should involve sustainability and maintaining the environmental integrity of La Crosse, or at the very least, give back to the citizens of La Crosse in some way.

The World War Veteran's Monument was originally installed in the middle of the largest lawn in Riverside, ruining Nolen's specific wide, open lawn design. It was later moved closer to the river. Its current position does provide a certain awkwardness in the lawn through its concrete indent, though, and the flagpole further in stands out even further. To protect the integrity of the lawn and Nolen's philosophy of wide, unimpeded green lawns, the cannon and flagpole should either be moved to an area where they can be enjoyed as the main center of attraction, rather than an aside off the lawn, or the concrete area should be expanded into a square space, perhaps with benches, to provide a look of intent in the area. A good example of clear design intent for a similar site is the south Veterans' Monument, also in Riverside Park, which is positioned to be the main attraction of its site.



As of Spring 2024, the Hiawatha Statue and the pergola are not in Riverside Park. The pergola was positioned directly off one of the pathways in an awkward space, while the Hiawatha Statue was considered to be gaudy, ahistorical, and required a lot of upkeep. Both current removals fit in with Nolen's original park plan. The pergola may be able to fit in nicely in a different area in the park, but its original position disrupted the natural flow of the walkway.

## **Conclusion**

This report summarizes the history of Riverside Park, urban planning, and John Nolen as La Crosse's park system designer, and recommends park ordinance and policy direction to the Board of Park Commissioners. The goal is to maintain the integrity of Riverside Park's design and its cultural significance to the community, and to update policies in alignment with other cities' policies. It is my sincere hope that these goals have been met with the recommendations in this report.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on this exciting project and future park policy for the people of La Crosse and surrounding communities.

Respectfully submitted, May 13, 2024.

*Kit Kirsch*

Kit Kirsch

# Appendix

## I. Photos:

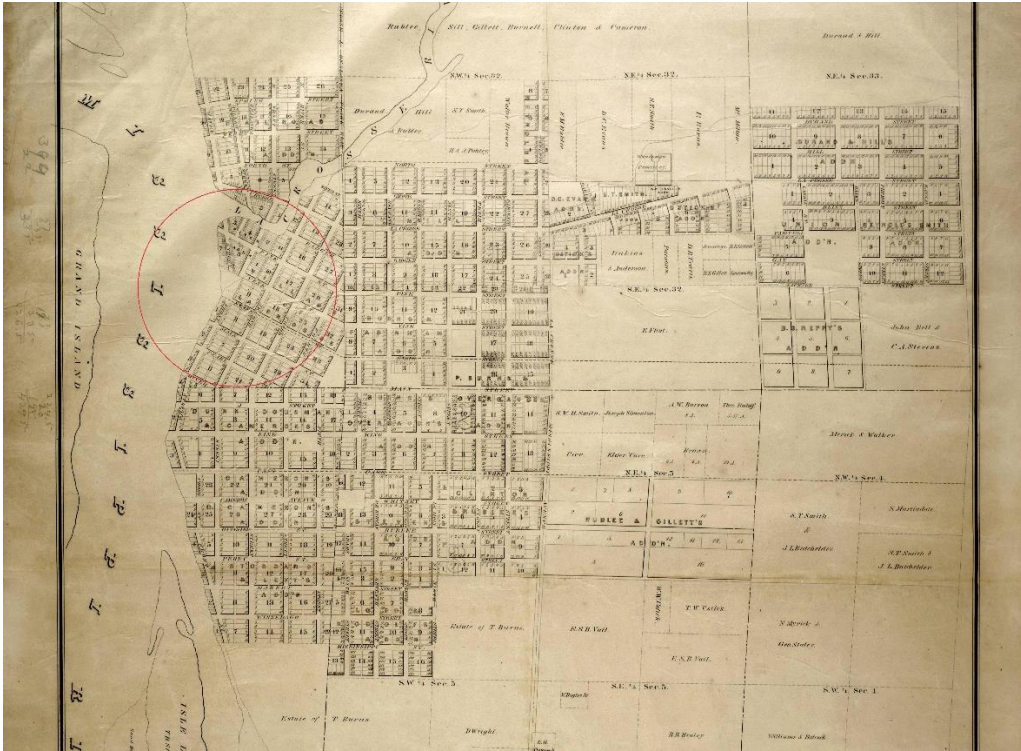
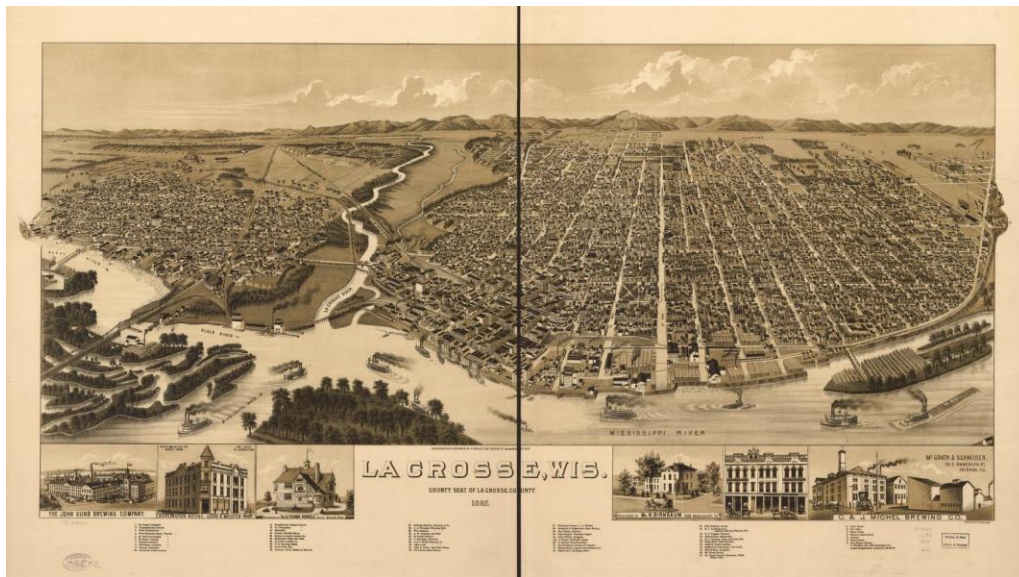


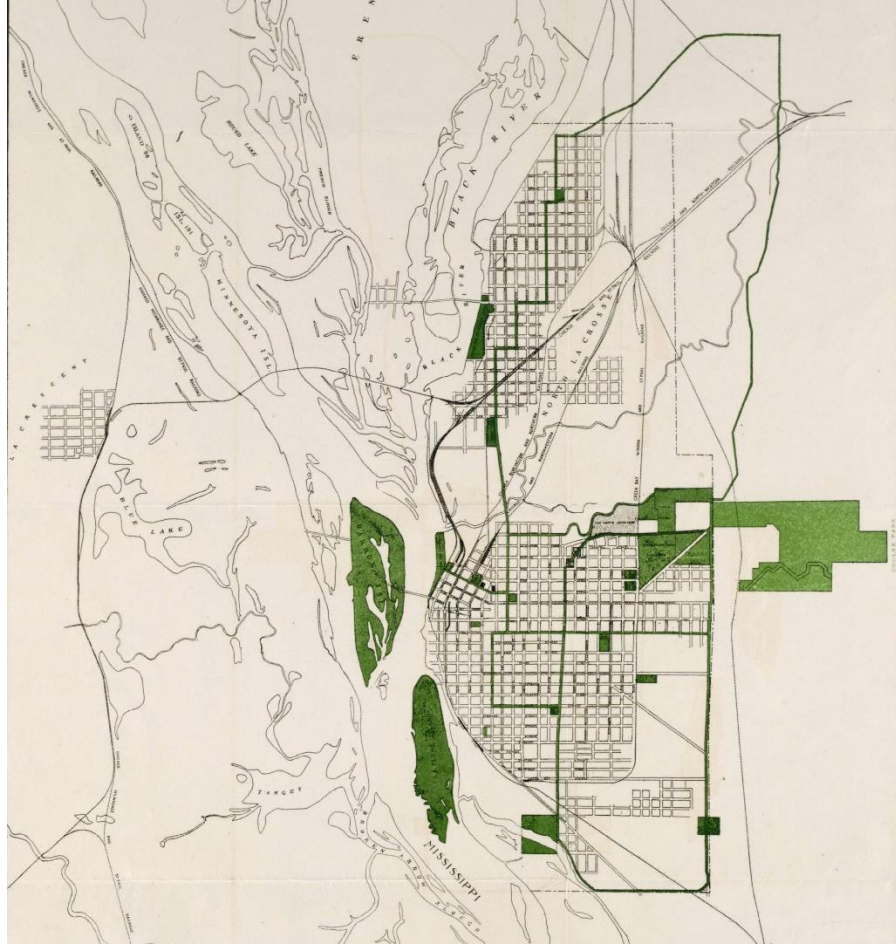
Exhibit 1 – Map of the city of La Crosse, 1857. [future Riverside circled, map cropped for perspective]



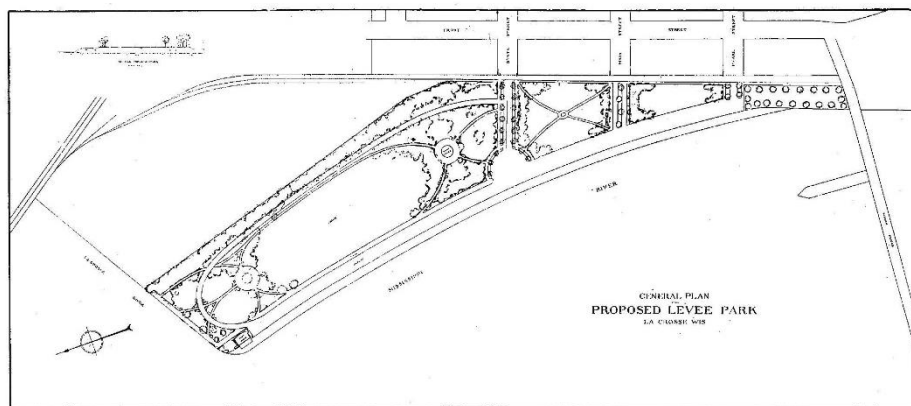
**Exhibit 2 – Birds eye view of La Crosse, 1867.**



**Exhibit 3 – Birds eye view of La Crosse, 1887.**



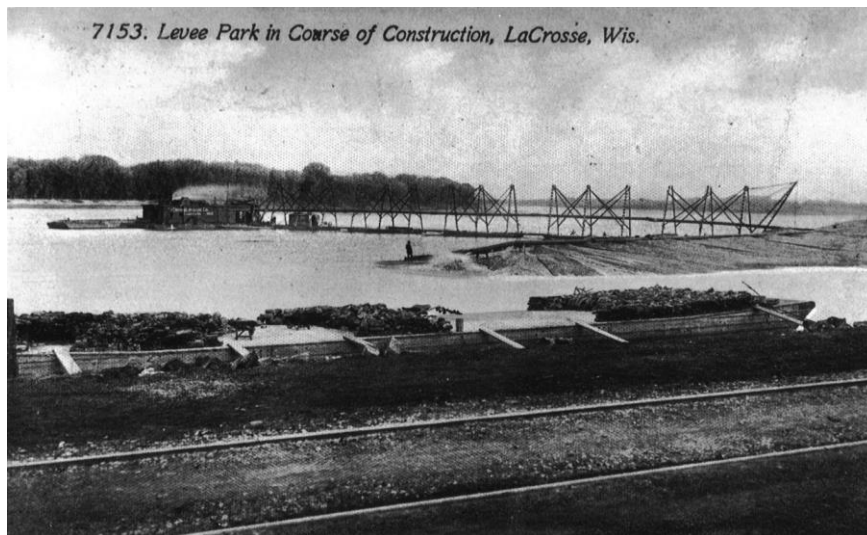
**Exhibit 4 – City Park System for La Crosse by John Nolen, 1911. [map cropped for perspective]**



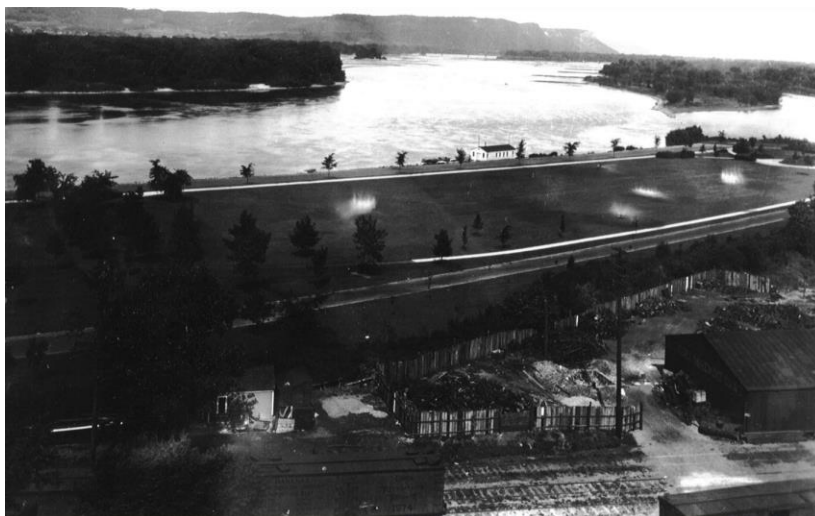
**Exhibit 5 – Proposed Levee Park design by John Nolen, 1911. [map cropped for perspective]**



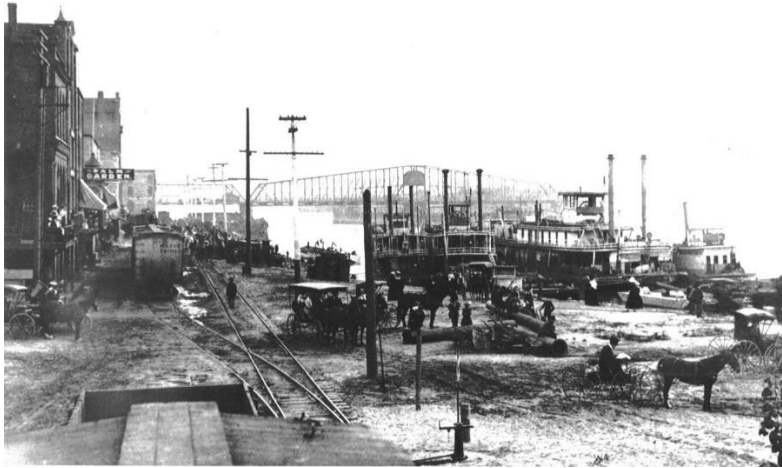
**Exhibit 6 – Levee construction.**



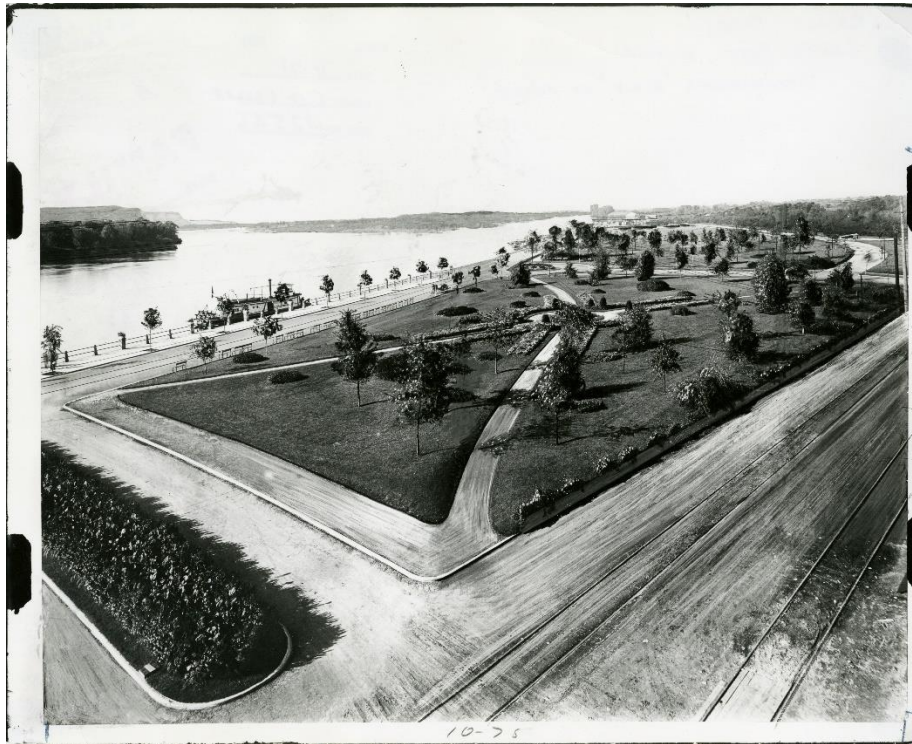
**Exhibit 7 – Levee Park, 1911.**



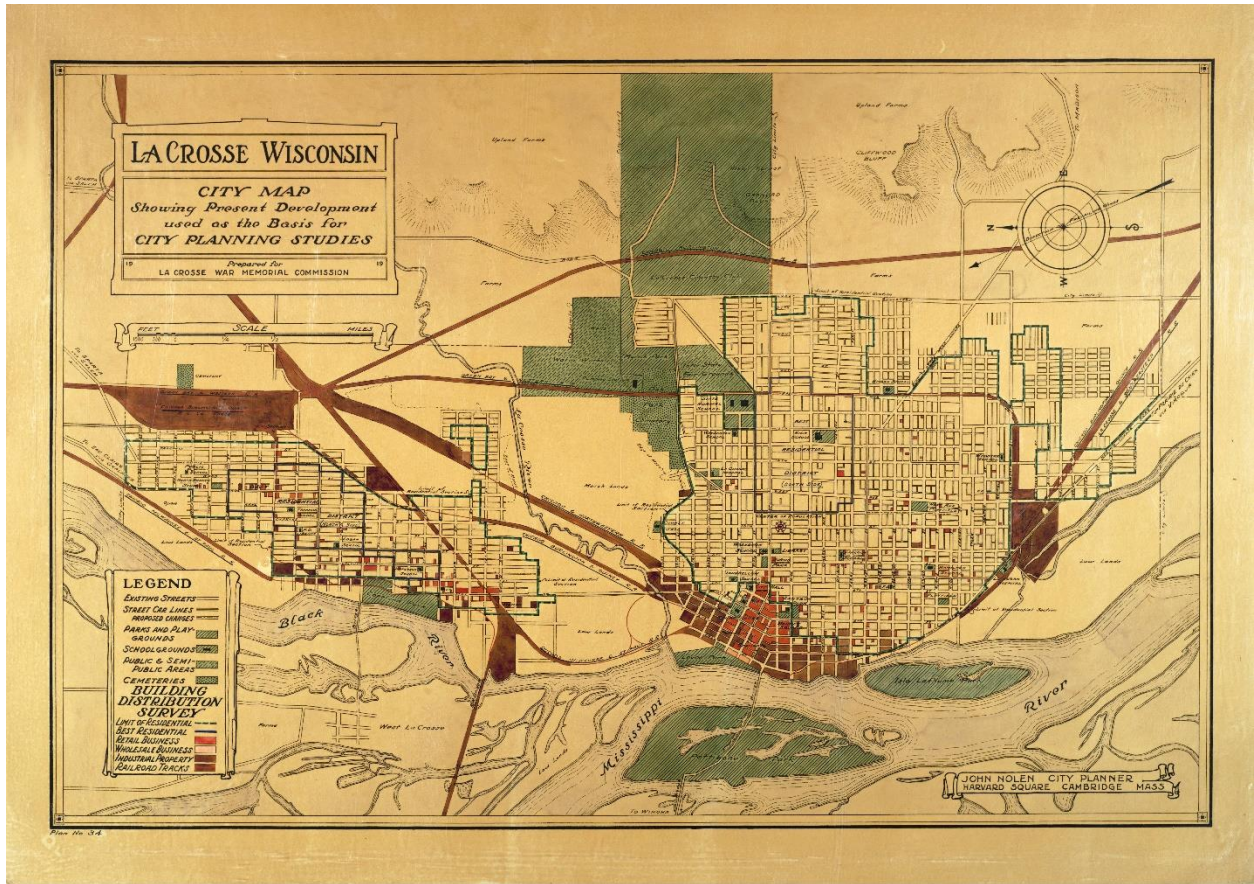
**Exhibit 8 – Levee Park, 1912.**



**Exhibit 9 – Riverfront Steamboats.**



**Exhibit 10 – Levee Park, 1914.**



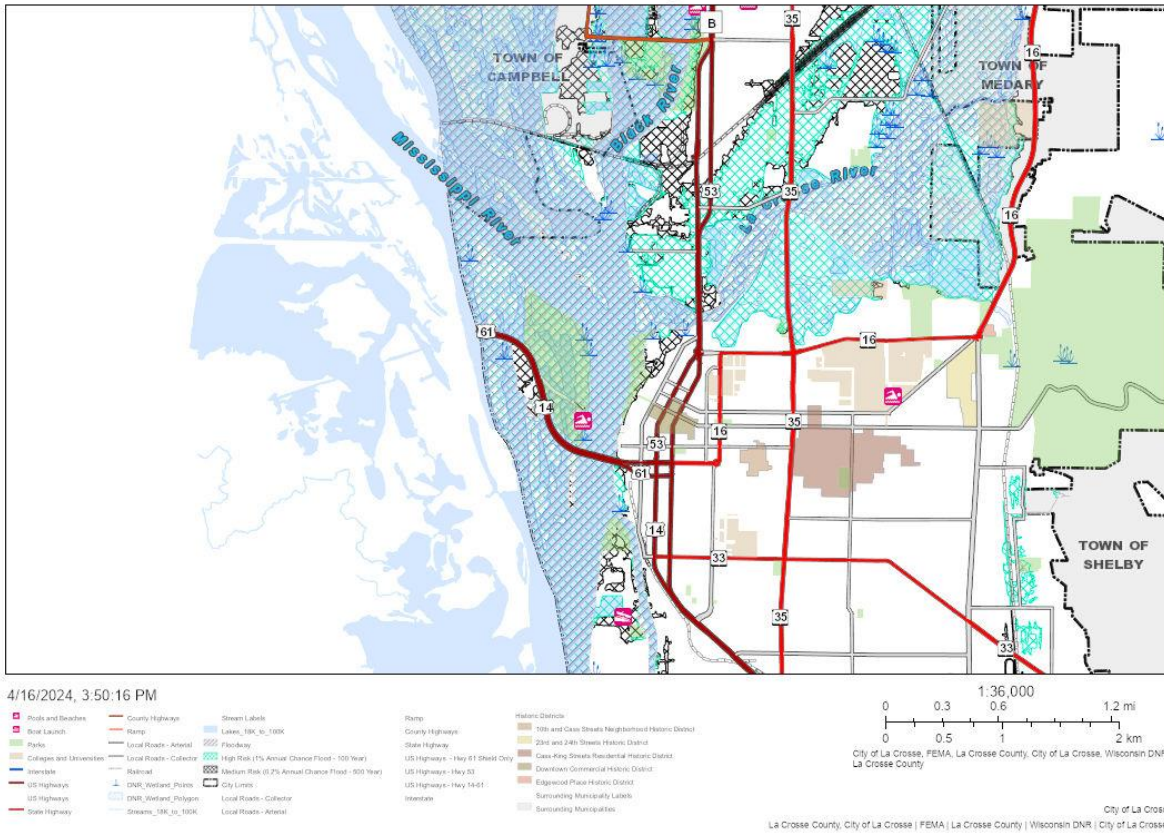
**Exhibit 11 – City map showing building distribution survey by John Nolen, 1919.**



**Exhibit 12 – Map of Riverside Park, 2022.**



ArcGIS Web Map



**Exhibit 13 – Floodplains Map 2024**

**II. Definitions:**

- a. **Community Park:** facility that serves several neighborhoods; primarily for young people and adults. Should be accessible by public transportation and half off-street parking facilities. It shares facility features with the playground, neighborhood park, and playfield. Definition provided by the La Crosse Area Planning Committee and Candeb, Fleissig and Associates report from 1972.
- b. **Neighborhood Park:** area for passive recreation. Should have trees for sun protection; may have things like trees, an open lawn area, shrubbery, tables and benches, storage and toilet facilities, a shelter building, ornamental pools or fountains, and a play apparatus for children. Definition provided by the La Crosse Area Planning Committee and Candeb, Fleissig and Associates report from 1972.
- c. **Playfield:** area providing recreational forms for youth and adults for several neighborhoods. Should have game court areas for varied sports and a shelter building, and storage and toilet facilities. May be lighted for night use; must have off-street parking. Definition provided by the La Crosse Area Planning Committee and Candeb, Fleissig and Associates report from 1972.
- d. **Playground:** primarily serves preschoolers to 12-year-olds; center for outdoor play. Can have a flexible design for short-term activities. Definition provided

by the La Crosse Area Planning Committee and Candeub, Fleissig and Associates report from 1972.

- e. Progressivism: Movement large in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, focused on improving society through various social reforms.
- f. Regional Park: Designed and developed to be able to facilitate large numbers of people. May have things like a large picnic area, athletic fields, playgrounds, play areas, nature trails, archery ranges, day camps, sports centers, boating facilities, and off-street parking. Definition provided by the La Crosse Area Planning Committee and Candeub, Fleissig and Associates report from 1972.
- g. Sustainability: sustainability imposes “limits to growth” to ensure development fulfills current needs without overconsumption, compromising the ability to fulfill future needs, as defined by *Our Common Future* (1987) by the Brundtland Commission
- h. Quit-Claim Deed: A quit-claim is a legal document that transfers property without it being sold.

### III. City of La Crosse Parks:

- a. From the 1972 definitions:
  - Community Parks:
    - a) Badger/Hickey Park, 1007 Palace St
    - b) Burns Park, 702 Main Street
    - c) Clayton E. Johnson Park, 4701 33rd St S
    - d) Crowley Park, 2100 Campbell Rd
    - e) Erickson Park, 2423 21st Pl S
    - f) Goose Green Park, 629 Kane St
    - g) Hass Park, 3600 Easter Dr
    - h) Merry Meadows Park, 4200 Meadowlark Ln
    - i) Poage Park, 500 Hood Street
    - j) Powell Park, 1002 West Ave S
    - k) Red Cloud Park, 416 Powell Street
    - l) South Library Park, 1616 Farnam Street
    - m) Springbrook Park, 3519 Springbrook Way
    - n) Weigent Park, 1500 Cass St
  - Neighborhood Parks:
    - a) Bluffview Park, 2800 Jackson St
    - b) Chad Erickson Park & Vietnam Veteran’s Pond, 3601 Park Lane Dr
    - c) Civic Center, 500 2nd Street S
    - d) Coulee Park, 2101 Coulee Dr.
    - e) Diagonal Park, 2935 23rd Street
    - f) Glendale Park, 2600 29th Street S
    - g) Highland Park, 2500 Highland Street
    - h) Roellig Park, 600 Losey Blvd N

- i) Roesler Park, Country Road MM
- j) Schuh Park, 2225 Horton Street
- k) Seminary Park, 3400 East Ave S
- l) Sherwood Park, 3300 Nottingham Street
- m) South Goose Green Park, 1012 St. Andrews Street
- n) Starlite Park, 2421 Hengle Court
- o) Verchota Park, 1825 22nd Street
- p) Wittenberg Park, 2940 George Street
- Playground:
  - a) Pumpkin Patch Park, Brickyard Lane
- Playfield:
  - a) Carroll Park, 1717 Marco Dr.
- Regional Parks:
  - a) Trane Park, 1500 Chase Street
  - b) Cameron Park, 400 King Street
  - c) Copeland Park, 1130 Rose Street
  - d) Grandad Bluff Park, 3020 Grandad Bluff Road
  - e) Green Island Park, 2312 7th Street S
  - f) Lueth Park, 1200 La Crosse Street
  - g) Myrick Park, 2107 La Crosse Street
  - h) Pettibone Park, 101 Pettibone Drive S
  - i) Riverside Park, 100 Block State Street
  - j) Veterans Freedom Park, 120 Clinton Street

b. Comments on Park Classification:

- Regional parks most often fall under community parks, and pocket parks most often fall under neighborhood parks. Playground and playfield parks usually fall under neighborhood or community, depending on facilities provided.
- These definitions and classifications are provided based on a 1972 report. At some point since, playground and playfield became unneeded classifications, and have been largely absorbed into what is now called a pocket park. Pocket parks are usually smaller, with a play apparatus for children and open green spaces. The definition of neighborhood and community park also seems to have been switched since 1972.
- For the sake of keeping one definition throughout the whole report, I have chosen to define these parks under the provided 1972 definitions.
- Spence Park is functionally a part of Riverside Park.

**IV. List of Acceptable Trees on Boulevards:**

<u>TALL</u>	<u>SMALL</u>
Honeylocust	Tree Lilac

Hackberry	Musclewood
Linden	Amur Maackia
Alder	Crabapple
River Birch	Hawthorne
Ginkgo (male)	Ironwood
Amur Corktree	Alder
Oak	Red Bud
DED Resistant Elm	Magnolia
Kentucky Coffee Tree	Fruitless Pear/Plum
Hickory	Serviceberry
Zelkova	Dogwood
Buckeye	
Catalpa	
Tulip Poplar	
Turkish Filbert	
Sycamore/Plane Tree	

List taken from [Sec. 34-144](#). – Regulations for planting and care of trees, focused on Boulevard trees.

V. **Map, Photo & Ordinance Citation:**





a. Maps:

- Spear, William and Henry I. Bliss. *Map of the City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1857*. (Bliss and Spear, La Crosse, WI) 1857. [Map]. Map cropped and edited by Kit Kirsch. Located in UW La Crosse Special Collections.
- Ruger, A. and Chicago Lithographing Co. *Birds eye view of the city of La Crosse, Wisconsin*. (Chicago, Chicago Lithographing Co.) 1867. [Map]. Located in Library of Congress, Geography & Map Division. <https://lcn.loc.gov/73694545>.
- Wellge, H., and Beck & Pauli. *La Crosse, Wis., county seat of La Crosse County*. (Milwaukee, H. Wellge) 1887. [Map]. Located in Library of Congress, Geography & Map Division. <https://lcn.loc.gov/75696710>.

- Nolen, John and La Crosse WI Park Commission. *City park system for La Crosse Wisconsin*. [Map]. 1911. Located in UW La Crosse Special Collections.
  - Screenshot from Nolen, John. *Making of a Park System in La Crosse: Report*, (Inland Printing Company, La Crosse, WI), 1911, p. 4. Located in La Crosse Public Library, La Crosse, Wisconsin. Taken 4/16/2024.
  - Nolen, John. *La Crosse Wisconsin: city map showing present development used as the basis for city planning studies, building distribution survey / prepared for La Crosse War Memorial Commission*. (Cambridge, MA) [Map] 1919. Located in UW La Crosse Special Collections.
  - Screenshot of map of Riverside Park, 2022. Located within City Parks & Rec drive.
  - ArcGIS Web map, Screenshot of map of Floodplains of La Crosse, taken 4/16/2024.
- b. Photos: (taken from City system—within City Planning Department)
- 6 - Photos – Murph\_Leveeconstr
  - 7 - Murph\_leveepark1911
  - 8 - Murph\_Levee1912
  - 9 - Murph\_riverfrontsteamboats
  - 10 - Park-1\_Levee-Park\_1914\_Murphy-Library-Special-Collections-and-ARC
- c. Municipal Code:
- Duluth, MN:  
[https://library.municode.com/mn/duluth/codes/legislative\\_code?nodeId=Chapter%2035%20-%20Parks%20and%20Recreation](https://library.municode.com/mn/duluth/codes/legislative_code?nodeId=Chapter%2035%20-%20Parks%20and%20Recreation)
  - Edgar, WI:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/edgarwi/latest/edgar\\_wi/0-0-0-9328](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/edgarwi/latest/edgar_wi/0-0-0-9328)
  - Le Sueur, MN:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/lesueur/latest/lesueur\\_mn/0-0-0-3867](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/lesueur/latest/lesueur_mn/0-0-0-3867)
  - Linden, WI:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/lindenwi/latest/linden\\_wi/0-0-0-1927](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/lindenwi/latest/linden_wi/0-0-0-1927)
  - Medford, WI:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/medford/latest/medford\\_wi/0-0-0-2500](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/medford/latest/medford_wi/0-0-0-2500)
  - Menomonie, WI:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/menomoniewi/latest/menomonie\\_wi/0-0-0-4558](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/menomoniewi/latest/menomonie_wi/0-0-0-4558)

- Minneapolis, MN:  
[https://library.municode.com/mn/minneapolis/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=PAREBOCOOR](https://library.municode.com/mn/minneapolis/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PAREBOCOOR)
- Park Rapids, MN:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/parkrapids/latest/parkrapids\\_mn/0-0-0-2796](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/parkrapids/latest/parkrapids_mn/0-0-0-2796)
- Pepin, WI:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/pepinwi/latest/pepin\\_wi/0-0-0-1554](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/pepinwi/latest/pepin_wi/0-0-0-1554)
- Turtle Lake, WI:  
[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/turtlelake/latest/turtlelake\\_wi/0-0-0-5687](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/turtlelake/latest/turtlelake_wi/0-0-0-5687)
- Venice, FL:  
[https://library.municode.com/fl/venice/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=SPAGEOR\\_CH46PARE](https://library.municode.com/fl/venice/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=SPAGEOR_CH46PARE)
- Wisconsin:  
<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/340/01/15pm>

d. Links to city program templates:

- Duluth:
  - a)  Duluth\_MN\_Memorial Program Policy 1-
  - b)  Duluth\_MN\_Memorial Program Policy D
  - c)  Email text to staff for art review\_2023 I
- La Crosse:
  - a) Art Donation Agreement:  
<https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/home/showpublisheddocument/4054/637340441442770000>
  - b) Donation Form:  
<https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/home/showpublisheddocument/7390/638288306728770000>
  - c) <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/27>
  - d)  2022-2026 Strategic Plan.pdf
- Minneapolis:



- a) Minneapolis 2022  
Permit Insurance Re



- b) Minneapolis  
License and Mainte



- c) Minneapolis MPRB  
Public Art Process 20



- d) Minneapolis Murals  
2021 Example Propo



- e) Minneapolis Public  
Art in Parks Form 20

- f) [https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/volunteer-and-give/memorials\\_tributes/](https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/volunteer-and-give/memorials_tributes/)