



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
L A C R O S S E

July 13, 2020

(Via email)

La Crosse Board of Park Commissioners  
C/O La Crosse Parks, Recreation, Forestry & Facilities Department  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

Dear Commissioners:

I hereby request removal of the Hiawatha Statue from Riverside Park. It is time. Communities across our nation are facing the symbols from their pasts and making decisions about how to heal and move forward. Your leadership and action are needed to move La Crosse forward as a community.

The Hiawatha was commissioned as a tourist attraction about 60 years ago and was met with controversy almost immediately. Nearly all would agree that today's main tourist attractions highlight the natural beauty of our area including the Mississippi River and our bluffs, rivers, trails and marshes. The time to retire Hiawatha has come.

For the past two plus years, the City has been working with members of the Anthony Zimmerhagl family. The family contacted us to request the return of the statue and to relocate it out of the City. It is time to give this statue back to the family as requested. Although discussions with the family and other interested parties have been positive and encouraging, they have yet to secure the relocation site.

Therefore, I recommend the statue be temporarily stored at the City's Municipal Service Center (MSC). The family can obtain the statue and transport it to their desired location once identified. The City can store the statue for at least one-year, which should allow the family time to finalize their plans.

My office has worked with the City Clerk and Legal Department on the legislative history of the statue and the authority for who manages it. The Board of Park Commissioners has the authority to manage the parks in a manner in which their discretion indicates. This discretion includes removal of the statue from Riverside Park. The staff has identified the necessary funding to remove the statue now, to transport it to and store it at the MSC and to restore the current site to a natural state.

The future of the Hiawatha site presents another opportunity to heal. I would be pleased to pull together a group of citizens and stakeholders – including members of the Board of Park Commissioners – to address the site and develop a plan that pays proper respect to our Ho Chunk and First Nation people and to artist Anthony Zimmerhagl.

Sincerely,

Mayor Tim Kabat