

June 3, 2024

Re: 24-0683 Section 115-34 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse regarding frequency of rezoning and conditional use permit applications

Dear City Council Members,

The Boards of Directors and Leadership of Couleecap, Scenic Bluffs Community Health Centers, and YWCA La Crosse support 24-0683 to amend ordinances regarding the frequency of rezoning applications.

Earlier this year, our agencies filed a zoning petition that received a majority of votes but ultimately failed because of a super-majority requirement within the ordinances at that time. One month after our petition was denied, the Common Council changed that same ordinance requiring the super majority vote. Had our petition been submitted and considered one month later, our petition would have succeeded - not due to a significant change in content but because of a significant change in city ordinances.

In preparation of our zoning petition, we met several times with the City Planning Department and held many public meetings. These activities were from December 2023 – March 2024. As we learned later, the State of WI had passed a law in June 2023 requiring municipalities to update their ordinances to repeal super-majority ‘triggers’ when considering zoning changes. In their diligence, the City’s administrative team(s) was working on draft ordinances to ensure La Crosse would be in compliance. While these activities were happening in parallel to our activities, we were not aware.

Had we known the state law had changed and that the city was in the process of drafting new ordinances accordingly, we would have delayed our petition to ensure alignment with current law and best practice.

Item 24-0683 will enable petitioners like us to move forward in compliance with state law and city ordinances. Delaying our petition further is not in the best interest of advancing the City’s plans, our agencies, or most importantly, the city residents served by our agencies. Our request is that our zoning petition be reviewed based on the intent of the new law and not denied on a technicality.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

REACH Center Zoning Petitioners
Hetti Brown, Couleecap
Laurie Cooper Stoll, YWCA La Crosse
Kim Hawthorne, Scenic Bluffs Community Health Center