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From: Elsen@cityoflacrosse.org
Subject: FW: Ending Camping on Land Adjoining Marsh

From: D&C <chriskouhi@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 6, 2024 2:00:55 PM
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April 6, 2024

Dear Mayor Reynolds and Members of the Public Works Board:

We are writing in support of a proposal to ban camping in lands in and adjoining the marsh. We are most familiar with the stretch near the Asfor and Veterans' Trails.

We would like to begin by acknowledging *Pathways Home* and we applaud the leadership, energy, wisdom, and concern for the welfare of all that such an initiative requires. We understand that Implementation Goal #4 is to "End the Camps." We also appreciate that the issue is complex and that we need to have patience and to trust that our leaders are moving forward in the best way possible.

However, it is our opinion that two issues face the marsh that cannot wait for this initiative to take its course: fire and garbage. There were open fires in the marshland on Christmas Eve and when neighbors reported this to the city they were informed that there was nothing the city could do and that there was no ban on camping. I understand that these neighbors called the non-emergency police number (since the fires weren't as yet out of control). Fires have been sighted in the last couple of weeks. Should we call the fire department every time we see smoldering?

Although the marsh itself would recover from a fire, the black scar in the heart of La Crosse caused by such negligence on the city's part would not heal so quickly. And we must admit that sometimes we feel a little bitter as we sit on our deck and think: "Can it possibly be true that we are not allowed by the city to have a small, well-insulated grill on our deck and yet that same city tolerates campfires only yards away that, with a sudden gust of wind, could threaten our home and those of our forty or so neighbors?"

We have walked the Asfor/Veterans trail regularly since we moved to La Crosse eight years ago. We've noticed occasional campers and we haven't been too troubled except for being annoyed, as we think that many people would be, to see mounds of garbage occasionally building up in our neighborhood. Eventually volunteers and hard-working city employees have periodically cleaned things up. We have told ourselves that this is just a part of city living.

However, we have become convinced that this issue is much more serious. In the flooding last spring we personally witnessed mounds of trash in the water. And this spring the number of campers by the marsh is increasing and we see

nothing that will prevent further increases, except perhaps a flood. Anyone who has volunteered to clean up these campsites knows that each one translates into huge amounts of garbage as well as potentially toxic waste. We are not environmental engineers but we know that there is a limit to the amount of human dumping (knowingly tolerated!) that the slow-moving waters of the marsh can sustain. A marsh that turns into cesspool will not benefit anyone.

Thank you for listening,

Chris and Denny Hallemeier
14 Copeland Avenue

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Dennis & Christine Hallemeier