



Dear City Plan Commission,

I write this letter in support of the audio-documentary project in downtown La Crosse: *Hear, Here*. *Hear, Here* is important to the City in many ways. Additionally, I note that the CASSH/VPA Dean’s Office supports the *Hear, Here* project, and the UWL Foundation has committed to funding student workers for the project. In addition, we note that *Hear, Here* does the following work for the city in partnership:

1-TOURIST DRAW: *Hear, Here* acts as a tourist draw to the historic downtown and riverfront area. Over the last five years the downtown project has had over 10,000 individual calls from people in all 50 states. The website has had over 17,000 individual hits from people in 23 different countries around the world. The organization has printed off 1000 brochures a year for the past 5 years for a total of 5,000 brochures circulating.

2-DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, and EQUITY: *Hear, Here* creates a sense of diversity, inclusion and equity in our community. *Hear, Here’s* first priority is to record stories from historically underrepresented people: Hmoob, LBGTQ, People of Color, Ho Chunk, LatinX, differently abled, and those experiencing homelessness. As we listen to the stories we develop empathy for one another leading to a more just society.

3-EDUCATION PROGRAMMING: *Hear, Here* has developed extensive K-12 programming for area teachers (made available through the website). Each year actual and virtual field trips of 4th grade, 8th grade, and high school students use the project for lessons in Social Studies, English, Geography, and Art.

4-ECONOMIC IMPACT: *Hear, Here* gives numerous tours a year for downtown festivals (Bike Fest, Pride in the Park, Historic Downtown Day) and conferences who come from out of town. Heritage tourism is consistently among the most popular and lucrative forms of tourism, ranking as one of the top three economic sectors across the U.S. People who travel to experience the places that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present typically stay longer and spend several times more money than other visitors, creating a larger economic impact for host to communities. As you know, The Downtown District’s historical and architectural heritage tourism contributes significantly to the city’s and county’s economy. In 2014, tourism was a \$223.8 million annual business that provided 4,016 FTE jobs in La Crosse. For 2014, 84 large conventions brought 76,558 individuals who spent an estimated 38,330 room nights, some \$15.2 million in direct spending. Annually, an additional 6,000 people visit the city on riverboats, with an annual economic impact of \$300,000 during their four or six hour visits. The average day visitor spends \$55, while overnight visitors expend \$190 per day.

*Hear, Here* has become an integral part of our Downtown and our larger community with 70 stories added to the project in the last 5 years. It helps our downtown, and indeed, our city welcome more tourism resulting in an economic impact for downtown and surrounding businesses. It increases the visibility of the diversity of people in our city helping more people of various backgrounds feel welcome in the city core. Finally, *Hear, Here* helps to bring young people into the downtown for educational purposes. For these reasons I strongly support *Hear, Here’s* request for the City of La Crosse to support the *Hear, Here* program for the next two fiscal years through your Capital Budget. In these difficult times it is increasingly important to support art and culture projects like this one that help us remember what a strong community we have.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reading this letter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marie Moeller  
CASSH/VPA Associate Dean—Outreach and Communication

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