

Good afternoon!

I am writing in support of the proposed rezoning of the hatchery building in Riverside Park.

As a longtime resident of La Crosse and frequent visitor of the park the exterior of the hatchery building has always been a beautiful addition to the environment of the area and carries with it a historical authenticity that fits with the character of the improvements that have been made in the park over the years. I was ecstatic to hear that the rezoning includes the plan to preserve the exterior look of the building while creating infrastructure for large groups to enjoy the building and the surrounding park. This seems like the obvious and very good use of the space especially given its proximity to the large green area of the park. There's a stewardship responsibility of the city to treat the resource of the hatchery building as something of value, and the current proposal seems to have found a very good economic use of the facility that will provide revenue for other city projects.

In particular, the plan to potentially use the upper most floor as an Airbnb makes a ton of sense to me. There's not enough space in the building to do a more formal hospitality arrangement like a hotel or a bed-and-breakfast, and utilizing the space as more event space would likely be less lucrative for the city in the sense that the lease would have to be at a lower rate if that was the mandated use. I am sensitive to the concern that utilizing the space for events will create noise for the neighboring apartments, but so would basically any improvements to Riverside Park that increase utilization, which is almost always going to be a parks department objective. Obviously, there's a bit of a trade-off here, but it seems to me that the opportunity to make Riverside Park appealing to a larger audience, to provide the city with an increased revenue source, and provide an economic vehicle for preserving historical building in a sustainable way on balance is much more valuable than the negative affect that would be applied to the apartments nearby. Perhaps the city would consider funneling some % of the gross lease payments from the hatchery into a property tax relief for the apartment building on the condition that the savings are passed on to the tenants. That way the decreased utility of the apartments is at least acknowledged all preserving the lease revenue for the city, but given the complex issues around that kind of concession I would advocate for pushing forward with the rezoning as is rather than denying the plan given the choice between the two.

I think this is part of a larger conversation about what the best way forward is to preserving the many beautiful historical structures in La Crosse, many of which have fallen into disrepair given difficulty of finding modern uses for them. This project has the potential to serve as a prototype for preservation elsewhere in the city as the community can witness a successful conversion of a historic building to modern use. We have so much beautiful turn of the century architecture that is beyond our fiscal capability of restoring and preserving without a creative economic mechanism and this might serve as a catalyst for more creative engagement with our housing stock.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Dr. John Robinson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Robinson', written in a cursive style.