

**From:** Pr. Dione Stepanek <pastordione@lacrosseareasynd.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 14, 2024 10:00 AM  
**To:** ZZ Council Members  
**Subject:** Support for Reach Center rezoning

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Dear City Council Members,

I am writing today in support of the proposed rezoning of 212 11th Street S where the Reach Center is located.

I am writing today as a La Crosse citizen and as a representative of the La Crosse Area Synod of the ELCA. I serve as the Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission for the La Crosse Area Synod, ELCA and work with 73 Lutheran congregations in the greater La Crosse Area, 6 of which are in the La Crosse city limits, 1 of which is 10 blocks from the REACH Center. These congregations work as part of the wider community to assist people in low income and/or homeless communities. The REACH Center is a vital part of our wider community support and care for members of the La Crosse Community who find themselves in situations of poverty and homelessness. As ELCA Lutheran communities of faith in this community, support of the REACH Center's service are of vital importance for wholistic support of this city's community.

Transportation is not a given for people experiencing these situations. It is of vital important that services be collectively located to offer the best opportunity for lasting impact and transformative care. When those of us who are affluent argue against easy-to-access care and place undue burden on fantastic community service providers, we cannot argue with integrity that we are pro community, as the community is made up of real people of all different circumstances and needs. While people of affluence may have never had to personally consider the impact of service access, preferencing personal preference for traffic burden, parking, and personal comfort over the mental health care, housing, and medical needs of the most vulnerable members of our community is at odds with the La Crosse City's own vision to be a community "that offers the highest possible quality of life." This must include all of our community, which does indeed include people who need the services that the REACH Center provides.

The rezoning of this property is a logical and reasonable step to acknowledge the reality of how the building is and has always been used. When the area containing the REACH Center was rezoned as residential in the early 2000s, it was clear at that point that this building had never and would never be residential space. Rezoning the property with TND zoning will simply allow the owners to make necessary renovations to the interior of the building so that they can be appropriately configured for the services needed for our community without unnecessary red-tape. When things are zoned, it is easiest for all involved if they do not have to operate under a 'non-conforming' designation. If the property had been built and used as a single residential property in the past and then petitioned for non-conforming status, that would be a different issue. However, this non-congruent zoning status was placed upon the property after the fact. Rezoning simply acknowledges this reality and allows this important community service to do the good work for our most vulnerable population.

I, along with the wider ELCA faith community, urge you to vote YES for the rezoning of 212 11th Street S where the Reach Center is located, that we can live out the full potential of our community values and adequately recognize and give credit due for the positive and needed impact the REACH partners, including Couleecap and the YMCA - has already had in our community and will have going forward.

Thank you,  
Rev. Dione Stepanek  
115 20th St S

**Rev. Dione Stepanek** (she/her)

Director for Evangelical Mission / Assistant to the Bishop

**La Crosse Area Synod ELCA**

*Cultivating Life-Giving Relationships Rooted in God's Love*

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