To: Tim Acklin, City Planning Department, Mayor Washington-Spivey, Council Members

From: Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh

Re: City Council Planning Meeting September 16, 2025. Potential Zoning District Recommendations

Date: September 12, 2025

The Friends of the Marsh have met with Tim Acklin regarding the city re-zoning process at one of our monthly Enviro-Wednesday meetings and more recently we were pleased to sit down, online, as a board with the re-zoning consultants to discuss our concerns regarding comprehensive re-zoning. We have now reviewed the materials available online in advance of the Council Planning Meeting scheduled for Tuesday September 16, 2025. We have the following comments:

1. Our basic interest can be stated simply. We would like the highest level of zoning protection possible for the La Crosse River Marsh, wetland, floodplain, flood fringe. Conservancy District zoning accomplishes that objective. We are pleased to see that the proposal includes no changes to Conservancy criteria.

2. Breaking our objective down into component parts, though, It does not appear Conservancy District zoning has been expanded to include all of the northern portion of the marsh. If we are misreading the maps, please correct us. Heavy industrial zoning for the northern part of the marsh reflects the historic predisposition to develop the wetland and floodplain, something that law and practice now limit. We ask that the entire marsh be Conservancy District.

3. A twenty-acre section of what is called the River Point District situated at the mouth of the La Crosse River is not included in the proposed Conservancy District, although that property has been transferred to the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department. it includes a perched wetland, and the property is planned as minimum maintenance floodplain forest.

4. At our meeting with the consultants we spoke about the need for what I would now call a new Overlay District; a Conservation Overlay District that will extend perpendicular to the high-water mark around the entire marsh. This proposed new district would extend 500 feet from the edge of the marsh, all the way around, include all properties and have the following provisions: all new or re-constructed surfaces within that zone will include permeable pavement; the application of nitrogen, phosphorous and chloride will be limited; rain garden and retention basin structures will be encouraged through the use of property or water tax credits; and canopy trees will be protected and planted. An overlay district like this will extend some of the positive services of the marsh into adjacent areas of the city. It will also enhance environmental sustainability. Finally, it will contribute to the Climate Action Plan. The long-standing trend has been for the marsh to be encircled by concrete, streets, highways, parking lots, buildings.. Each of these things defeat at least some of the environmental benefits of the marsh. It's time to make good on one of our best community features.

In sum, we see this re-zoning process not as work designed to confirm past practice, to stand pat, but to make some improvements not only in the built environment of our community but in our natural environment as well. Working with our landscape, not against it.

Thanks for the work you have done so far. The opportunities for community input have been very welcome. We'll be happy to respond to questions or comments.

Chuck Lee, President of the Board
Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh