LA CROSSE
WISCONSIN
400 LA CROSSE ST, LA CROSSE, WI 54601

Memorandum

To: Common Council of the City of La Crosse
From: Andrea Trane, Director of Planning and Development
Date: **June 2, 2026**
Re: 26-0481 – Resolution amending Appendix C Fee Schedule regarding sign permits under Subsections 111-36 of the La Crosse Municipal Code.

The purpose of this memo is to outline the costs incurred by the City to administer and collect annual sign permit fees and to demonstrate the relationship between these costs and the permit fee structure.

The annual billboard permit fee is an important tool for ensuring public safety, supporting effective land-use regulation, and maintaining the community's visual environment while recovering the City's costs for providing these services. Annual compliance allows staff to track changes when signs are removed, make sure new signs or sign faces are not erected, and ensure existing structures are in good condition.

In 2020, the annual fee increased from $10 to $20 per sign face. A software error was recently discovered that resulted in sign owners continuing to receive invoices for the prior, lower fee amount rather than the updated fee. This error was corrected as part of the current fee adjustment and highlights the need for continued administrative oversight and accurate cost recovery. The Common Council's approval in November 2025 to increase the fee to $75 provided staff with an opportunity to reassess the City's actual costs associated with administering the permits. (If increased only by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the 2026 fee would have been $29.)

The city sign code does not allow for new off premise signs, such as billboards. When reviewing comparable communities in Wisconsin that continue to permit new off-permit signage, many rely on the initial permit fees rather recurring annual renewals. In looking at other Wisconsin communities that have an annual permit fee, the fee amount ranges from a biennial renewal fee of $100 in the Town of Campbell to $550 annually in Wauwatosa.

For each sign face, the City's inspection and billing process includes:
• Traveling to and from the billboard site
• Inspecting the structure for updates, repairs, or compliance issues
• Taking photo documentation
• Uploading documentation into the permitting database
• Issuing invoices and tracking payments
This process requires approximately 45 minutes to one hour per sign.

The following reflects annual costs associated with administering billboard permits:
• Inspector hourly salary and benefits: $60.75
• Overhead (software, printing, postage, mileage): $1,341.11•

Based solely on the cost to administer the program, I recommend updating the permit fee schedule to $40 per sign face. With an inventory of 187 sign faces, the estimated annual cost to administer the program is $7,600, while the anticipated permit revenue would be approximately $7,480.