

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
VA Great Lakes Health Care System
500 E. Veterans Street
Tomah, WI 54660



December 19, 2018

City of La Crosse, Common Council
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Dear Council Members:

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to questions regarding our request for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for 3120 Farnam Street from Council Members, the city's Planning staff, and the community. However, I would first like to recognize Barb and Dave Erickson for their gracious donation of their home to the Tomah VA Medical Center's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) – Transitional Residence (TR) Program.

I also would like to thank our potential neighbors who attended an open community Town Hall Meeting-style event yesterday evening at American Legion Post 52. We had a wonderful exchange of questions and answers from interested members of the community. I'm including the presentation we delivered as Enclosure M.

Our La Crosse CWT-TR program will include eight Veteran occupants, the Care Manager, and one VA security assistant who will work evenings, weekends and holidays.

The CWT program helps Veterans develop basic work skills that are essential to successful long-term employment, such as appropriate dress/appearance, personal hygiene, punctuality, and getting along with co-workers. It does this by Veterans earning employment positions and working with mentors (see Enclosure A for local community supporters and employers of Veterans in the program). Additionally, the TR program provides a bridge between our inpatient and intensive outpatient treatment programs and successful community reintegration. We utilize a residential therapeutic community of peer and professional support, with a strong emphasis on increasing personal responsibility and achievement of individualized rehabilitation goals.

The TR also allows for sustainment of programming and treatment. On Wednesday's members of the TR discuss strategies and tactics for community integration. The group decides where to volunteer their services. At the Tomah VA Medical Center, they will often provide assistance to Veterans confined to wheelchairs to get them to/from recreational opportunities.

Application for Conditional Use Permit at 3120 Farnam

CWT-TR residents also construct a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). This is a self-designed prevention and wellness process that Veterans use to get well, stay well and make their life the way they want it to be. It is now used extensively by people in all kinds of circumstances, and by health care and mental health systems all over the world to address all kinds of physical, mental health and life issues. WRAP has been studied extensively in rigorous research projects and is listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices.

Veterans participate in other aftercare programs in the community such as Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Narcotics Anonymous.

In fact, 100% of Veterans are employed upon entry or within one week of entering the program. Additionally, in the past fiscal year, more than 70% of Veterans in the CWT-TR program achieved permanent housing in the community. More than 65% have stayed local and have competitive employment in the community.

Safety

Safety of our Veterans and members of the neighborhood is my highest priority. Our housing conditions will support the health, safety and well-being of not only our Veteran residents, but also our surrounding community.

A full-time Care Manager will oversee the TR program and additionally, unlike any other TR program in the United States, we will also employ a Security Assistant to be on-site for night, weekend and holiday hours.

As I've said in remarks at the Planning Commission and in previous documents, we will not house Violent Offenders (42 U.S. Code, Chapter 46, Subchapter XVI) or Sex Offenders (34 U.S. Code, Subtitle II, Chapter 209, Subchapter 1) at this CWT-TR location.

There are 21 CWT-TR programs in residential neighborhoods throughout the United States. Some programs, like the program hosted in Hampton, Virginia, operate multiple residences. There are 45 larger single-family homes – each with 6-10 beds – in VA's TR program. In the history of the CWT-TR program (since 1994), no home has had its CUP pulled due to non-compliance. It will certainly be the Tomah VA's responsibility to meet all VA Life Safety Codes based on the size of the home and the number of beds.

According to the VA national program office, in the past two years there have been zero reported incidents from CWT-TR programs throughout the nation that have negatively impacted neighbors or neighborhood safety. Additionally, there have been zero reports of property damage caused by TR program residents.

Preventing Veteran suicide is VA's number one clinical priority. Our current data shows 20 Veterans, active duty service members, guardsmen and reservists commit suicide each day. But

Application for Conditional Use Permit at 3120 Farnam

out of those 20, 14 are not receiving care through VA. I'm very proud of the continuum of mental health care we provide - from basic outpatient to severe acute care. We will always be there for our Veterans. In the past two fiscal years there were no reported suicide deaths in the nation's TR program.

Like all of the Tomah VA Medical Center's operations. The CWT-TR program will be accredited by The Joint Commission for Behavioral Health Standards and through the Comprehensive Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) programs. We are required to notify both of the addition of a location within 30 days of Veteran occupancy. These organizations will have the option to initiate early surveys if they choose.

Screening Criteria

The CWT-TR program is an advanced program where Veterans meeting the admission criteria are both medically and mentally stable. Veterans are assessed by a clinical treatment team to ensure they are ready for the responsibilities of the program. Many of the Veterans admitted to the program are graduates from one or more other VA treatment programs. This program is the final step toward independent living. The Tomah VA Medical Center will still run a CWT-TR program on the Tomah campus. Only stable, non-sex offender, Veterans without a history of violent offenses, who are successfully progressing toward program graduation will be admitted to the La Crosse location.

Only Veterans meeting screening criteria will be admitted which may result in less than eight Veterans occupying the home occasionally.

CWT-TR Program Resident Goals

Veterans are expected to do the same things other citizens do, such as pay for their housing, shop, cook, clean and maintain the house, and care for the residence. Living in the therapeutic residence provides Veterans with opportunities to develop and practice responsible, positive life skills as they reintegrate into the community. Some of the goals of the CWT-TR program are to help Veterans:

- Manage their life in an independent and productive manner.
- Receive skills training such as money management.
- Learn independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning and home maintenance.
- Develop good work habits.
- Remain sober and improve their mental health status in a supportive residential setting.
- Strengthen stress management, interpersonal skills and other individualized coping skills.

Application for Conditional Use Permit at 3120 Farnam

- Identify and utilize existing community support systems such as AA/NA/SMART, sponsors and other positive influences and community resources.
- Minimize reliance on institutional care.
- Sharpen job-search techniques for competitive job placement, such as interview skills
- Explore reintegration into community and family living.
- Obtain and maintain employment and stable housing in the community.

CWT-TR Program Resident Conduct

All Veterans must conduct themselves in a respectful manner, always considering the thoughts, feelings, and rights of others. Veterans in the program have the following code of conduct that they are expected to follow:

- No firearms, alcohol, or drugs allowed
- Follow all the Tomah VA Medical Center's CWT-TR's safety rules and posted signs.
- Be considerate and respectful of all other Veterans, staff members and community neighbors.
- Cooperate with staff and following their treatment plan.
- Keep all scheduled diagnostic or treatment appointments, and take their medications as prescribed by their VA physician or Primary Care Provider.
- Avoid interference in the treatment of other TR residents.
- Alert the staff when another resident is having difficulties.
- Ensure that visitors be considerate of other residents and neighbors, while observing visiting hours and rules. (No overnight guests)
- Behave in a manner that is not abusive and does not violate the rights of others.
- Participate in community-based activities as part of their treatment plan.
- Participate in community volunteer activities as determined by all the house members and the CWT-TR Care Manager.

Mr. Dave Curry, is the La Crosse CWT-TR Care Manager and his contact number is (608) 567-8572. He is the primary point-of-contact. Mr. Curry will handle any complaints or issues and is responsible for discussions to resolve any issues. Mr. Curry will ensure neighborhood complaints (if any) are addressed appropriately and swiftly. As the TR's Care Manager, he is the responsible official for deciding on corrective actions and will follow-up with a complainant via telephone or in-person. Mr. Curry's position description is included as Enclosure L.

Application for Conditional Use Permit at 3120 Farnam

Mr. Curry's direct supervisor is Mr. Dan Hannan, CWT-TR Program Manager, and can be reached at (608) 377-1109. Mr. Hannan also provides a secondary review of all aspects of Tomah VA's CWT-TR program. In the unlikely event that the Mr. Curry and Mr. Hannan cannot resolve an issue, the Tomah VA's Mental Health Service Line Manger can be contacted at (608) 372-3971 Ext. 61631.

CWT-TR Program Community Support

Prior to the CWT-TR program initiation at the Farnam location, the Tomah VA will conduct an Open House. Additionally, neighbors are welcome to come knock on the door and introduce themselves.

CWT-TR Program Resident Compliance

There are several house rules and responsibilities that each Veteran must effectively adhere to, not only to stay in the program, but to successfully complete the program. Resident's room are inspected daily (Enclosure I). There are also monthly Environmental Inspections (Enclosure N).

Veterans must be serious about their recovery to be successful in the program. They rely on each other, VA staff, family and friends for support as they work towards their successful completion of the program.

Residents in the program are accountable for their actions and behavior. Each Veteran is looked at as an individual and the treatment team (along with the Veteran) will make a joint decision about continuing in the program. The safety of Veterans and our community members will always be a primary concern.

If a Veteran is removed from the La Crosse CWT-TR program, options for their following care and treatment will be dependent on the violation that occurred and the level of care needed by the Veteran. The Tomah VA clinical team will make a decision ensuring that the Veteran receives safe and appropriate levels of care.

Parking

Parking has been an issue brought up by many. Enclosures B and C depict a garage very capable of storing three vehicles. Enclosures D and E provide the details showing how four spots are available for use in the driveway. Enclosure F (green shaded section) is the area where we have approval from the River Valley VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic landlord for an additional three parking spots (Enclosure G). These parking spots are in an employee parking area and will not interfere with Veteran parking at our River Valley Outpatient Clinic.

Application for Conditional Use Permit at 3120 Farnam

One Government-Leased Vehicle will be made available to the CWT-TR Care Manager and Security Assistant to transport Veterans to/from the River Valley Clinic parking location if needed.

There are no plans to consider further property modifications in order to increase off-street parking spaces as the number of maximum vehicles have been accounted for (assuming every TR program resident owns a car, which has never been the case in the history of the program).

Historical data demonstrates that no greater than 40% of the Veterans own cars while in the program. Some choose to use public transportation options.

The Tomah VA Medical Center will not purchase adjacent or surrounding properties for off-street parking.

Privacy Landscaping

The facility is willing to look at requests for the addition of trees, shrubs or landscaping to help mitigate privacy issues.

Taxes

The donation of this property to VA may take 12 – 24 months to complete. In the interim, the Tomah VA will execute a lease agreement with the Erickson's.

Once the property transfer to VA (Federal Government) is completed it will become tax exempt. The VA is willing to work through legal counsel to negotiate with the City of La Crosse to make Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PiLoT).

Property Upkeep and Maintenance

As a part of their program responsibilities, the Veterans residing at the La Crosse property will maintain the house both inside and out. Resident's rooms will be inspected daily by staff (Enclosure I). In addition, the house will be included in the Tomah VA Medical Center's annual budget like all buildings owned or leased by the Tomah VA Medical Center and have a planned maintenance allowance to ensure upkeep to established federal standards. It will carefully be maintained and decorated appropriately to continue to blend into the community as it currently does.

Loss of Value of Surrounding Properties

Some of our potential neighbors have made mention that the CWT-TR program "will impact the value of my house in an adverse way" or the home "will devalue my property to an extent (approximately 20%) that far exceeds the amount of down payment on my home" and concerns about the "negative impact on our property value and those in the neighborhood." I am certain

Application for Conditional Use Permit at 3120 Farnam

that you are aware that Wisconsin's Act 67 requires "substantial evidence" in the record to support a denial of the CUP and "personal preference" or "speculation" of a person opposed to the CUP is not substantial evidence.

The Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, a joint research center of the New York University School of Law and the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU, conducted a study to determine if supportive housing developments depress or raise neighborhood property values. They conducted a "rigorous, large scale examination of the impacts of approximately 7,500 units of supportive housing created in New York City."

Their results were clear. "Our research finds little evidence to support neighbor's fears that supportive housing developments will reduce the price of surrounding properties over time. To the contrary, we find that the opening of supportive housing developments does not have a statistically significant impact on the values of the properties within 500 feet of the development." The study's policy brief is included as Enclosure H.

Additional Questions

Q1: Are overnight guests allowed:

A1: No overnight guests are allowed. Family members and friends may visit Veterans in the house during designated hours.

Q2: Will the VA use the home for any non-resident activities and if so, how will you accommodate non-resident parking/shuttle service during those activities?

A2: The Farnam home will be used exclusively for the CWT-TR program. In the case of an event for those residents, the VA will provide a shuttle service for parking at our River Valley Outpatient Clinic location.

Future

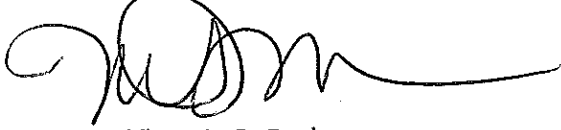
The Tomah VA does not envision increasing the number of residents at the Farnam Street location, nor will we purchase surrounding or adjacent properties.

Thank you for the opportunity to share how the CWT-TR program provides significant benefits to our Veterans and the community. Location of this program in La Crosse allows the Veterans to continue their mission of service to the community—a mission they started in the military, and now continue through volunteerism. The Tomah VA Medical Center and the CWT-TR Veterans look forward to becoming strong and trusted community partners.

Application for Conditional Use Permit at 3120 Farnam

I appreciate your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victoria P. Brahm', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Victoria P. Brahm
Medical Center Director

Enclosures

- A – Tomah VAMC Vocational Rehabilitation Partners and Employers
- B – Overhead depiction of 3120 Farnam Street
- C – Photograph of the 3120 Farnam Street garage
- D – Overhead view of 3120 Farnam Street and surrounding properties
- E – Photograph of driveway frontage of 3120 Farnam Street
- F – Overhead view of River Valley Clinic and employee parking
- G – River Valley CBOC Landlord Letter Re: Parking
- H – Furman Center Policy Brief – The Impact of Supportive Housing on Surrounding Neighborhoods: Evidence from New York City
- I – CWT-TR Room Inspection Sheet
- J – Americans with Disability Act
- K – Core Competencies for CWT-TR House Manager
- L – CWT-TR House Manager Position Description
- M – Tomah VA CUP Community Town Hall Meeting
- N – Farnam Home Video