

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
LA CROSSE

City Plan Commission
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

June 5, 2020

Dear Mayor Kabat and Commissioners,

I write to encourage the commission to continue funding *Hear, Here La Crosse*. As Executive Director of the UW-La Crosse Oral History Program, I know how difficult preserving our community's history and promoting public access to it can be. The innovativeness of *Hear, Here* is that it turns our city into an interactive space for historical inquiry and reflection. At each orange-signed location, we can learn about a fellow community member's connection to a building, business, or moment from our city's history. In their own words, the *Hear, Here* narrators invite us to understand La Crosse differently – in a deeper and more meaningful way. An apartment building we might otherwise rush past becomes an opportunity to reflect on the immigrant experience. A street corner becomes an opportunity to learn about local business history or community activism. The *Hear, Here* program offers multiple ways to introduce La Crosse's history: a passer-by might stumble upon a sign, a family might join one of the program's walking tours, grade school students might participate in the companion lesson plans.

The benefits of *Hear, Here* are wide-ranging: enhanced civic pride, increased public awareness about our community's diversity, tourists developing a curiosity about our city that may encourage them to visit us a second or third time. Objective metrics reinforce how successful the *Hear, Here La Crosse* program has been in its first five years: over 10,000 people have called into the telephone system to listen to the oral histories; many also shared their own experiences. Callers represent all 50 U.S. states, demonstrating *Hear, Here's* ability to promote La Crosse's story to all corners of our nation. Likewise, the program's website (www.hearherelacrosse.org) has drawn over 17,000 users from 23 countries. Thus far, the *Hear, Here* program has done an impressive job showcasing La Crosse to the wider world.

The city of La Crosse supporting a program like *Hear, Here* makes sense both pragmatically as well as historically. Since the 1850s La Crosse residents have continually searched for the most effective ways to tell our community's story to local, national, and international audiences. (Example: Rev. Spencer Carr's 1854 *A Brief Sketch of La Crosse, Wisc'n.*) Since 2015, *Hear, Here* has carried on this tradition in a truly remarkable way. The oral histories this program offers us are diverse, multi-generational, and thought-provoking. They have transformative potential: when we listen to them we connect to, and respect, our city's history in a different way. I truly believe it is our civic duty to continue funding this project.

Sincerely,



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