

Elsen, Nikki

From: Marty Walleser <propertyreliance608@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, December 1, 2024 7:00 PM
To: Elsen, Nikki
Subject: Agenda Item 24-1437: VOTE NO - A Choice Between Supporting Small Businesses or Non Local Corporate Interests
Attachments: Firestation Commons Proposal (2).pdf

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I am reaching out to you today to urge careful reconsideration of the proposal for the sale of Fire Station #2. This decision represents far more than a simple transaction—it's a choice between two fundamentally different visions for La Crosse.

Our proposal for **Firehouse Commons** focused on supporting small businesses, saving two local businesses from closing, and creating opportunities for others to thrive. It was about investing in the backbone of our community: the family-run businesses that sponsor our kids' sports teams, step up during community needs, and keep jobs local.

The competing proposal, while financially higher, comes from a party outside of La Crosse whose focus is on maximizing corporate interests. This isn't an apples-to-apples comparison—it's a decision about whether we prioritize **local small businesses** or **outside corporations**.

By approving the competing offer, we risk turning a historic, community-centered building into another cog in the corporate machine. But by revisiting and supporting the vision of **Firehouse Commons**, you have the opportunity to preserve what makes La Crosse unique: a thriving community built on hard work, local pride, and small business innovation.

Is La Crosse a city that stands for small businesses, families, and community? Or are we ready to let corporate interests define our future?

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this pivotal decision.

Sincerely,
Marty Walleser

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A PROPOSAL FOR FORMER FIRE STATION #2
626 MONITOR STREET, LA CROSSE

SUBMITTED BY: MARTY WALLESER & TIFFANY SMITH



FIREHOUSE COMMONS
COMMUNITY BUSINESS CENTER

A CATALYST FOR SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH AND
INNOVATION IN LA CROSSE'S NORTHSIDE.

2024

Revitalizing Communities: How Affordable Start-Up Spaces Fuel Economic Prosperity

Affordable spaces for small businesses are crucial in fostering local economic growth and reducing inequality in cities like La Crosse, WI.

When startups and small businesses lack access to affordable real estate, it can create a cascade of negative effects, including fewer job opportunities and stagnated economic development. This is particularly significant for cities looking to revitalize underutilized areas, such as La Crosse's Northside, which has some of the lowest socio-economic demographics in the region. By redeveloping vacant spaces and offering affordable options, the community can attract & retain entrepreneurs, increase property values, and create more economic activity (Wis Business).

For instance, the Coulee Region Business Center (CRBC) in La Crosse supports small businesses by offering below-market lease rates and essential services. They aim to reduce overhead for startups, offering incubator space that helps businesses grow and eventually "graduate" into the wider community. According to CRBC, this model has been effective in reducing barriers to entry for entrepreneurs and promoting long-term growth.

If affordable spaces aren't available, cities risk losing potential business talent to other regions, stunting job creation and innovation. This creates a cycle where vacant properties remain idle, diminishing the overall appeal and vitality of the community (WisBusiness & CRBC). Supporting affordable spaces for businesses is therefore a strategic way to boost both local economies and property values, thus benefiting the entire city.

When coupling such strategies for best practice of economic growth with the developer's love for La Crosse, joy in providing collaborative opportunities for fellow entrepreneurs, and a proven passion for property development this is a win-win for the city, community, and developer's.

EXTINGUISHING THE YEARS: APPRECIATION FOR FIRE STATION #2'S HISTORIC JOURNEY

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THIS PROPOSAL WILL:

- SAVE TWO LOCAL BUSINESSES THAT ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF SPACE TO OPERATE
- PROVIDE AFFORDABLE RENT
- SHOW LOYALTY TO LOCAL BUSINESSES
- BE OWNER OCCUPIED
- PRESERVE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE BY BLENDING THE FIRE STATION'S ORIGINAL 1956 STRUCTURE WITH MODERN USE.
- INCREASE TAX REVENUE FOR CITY OF LA CROSSE
- JOB CREATION & SMALL BUSINESS EXPANSION

In 2022, the City of La Crosse broke ground on a new Fire Station #2, located on La Crosse Street, which was designed to replace the Monitor Street station. The new facility reflects 21st-century needs, offering improved equipment and accommodations.



Fire Station #2, originally located at 626 Monitor Street in La Crosse, WI, was constructed in 1956 to serve the growing needs of the city's north side. The station played a critical role in fire services for decades but became outdated as modern firefighting requirements outgrew the mid-20th century infrastructure.



MULTI-USE SPACE

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Firehouse Commons is a transformative project that will turn the historic Fire Station #2 located at 626 Monitor Street in La Crosse into a thriving multi-use space for small businesses. This redevelopment will preserve the station's 1956 architecture while adding the parcel to the tax roll for the first time, generating new revenue for the city.

By offering affordable spaces for entrepreneurs in industries like woodworking, mechanics, printing, and construction, Firehouse Commons will become another catalyst project to further efforts in revitalization for La Crosse's Northside. A safe, affordable, and well maintained re-purposed space fuels further investment in our community — all while honoring this building's design and rich legacy of providing service & safety to our community.



FIREHOUSE COMMONS WILL PROVIDE CRUCIAL SPACE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Frequently **ASKED QUESTIONS**

What size are the proposed spaces?

Unit #1 40' Deep X 30' Wide includes 16ft door

Unit #2 60' Deep x 30' Wide includes 16ft door

Unit #3 40' Deep X 30' Wide includes 16ft door

Unit #4 60' Deep X 30' Wide includes 16ft door

How many tenants will the building hold?

The Firehouse Commons will thoughtfully secure four tenants.

Will rent be affordable?

Yes. While rent will be based on price paid for the building & renovation cost, our goal for unit rent range is \$1000-2000 per month per tenant which is well below market rent per square foot.

What types of businesses will be housed here?

Firehouse Commons will serve as a dynamic and intentional space designed to attract a diverse range of small businesses and entrepreneurs, with a focus on craftsmanship, custom trades, and artistic industries such as woodworking, furniture repair and design, leatherwork, art, printmaking, upholstery, and service-based enterprises. By fostering a collaborative, multi-functional business hub, we aim to meet the growing demand for such services in the community, while addressing the shortage of affordable, accessible spaces for providers. Our goal is to bridge this gap and support both consumers and businesses.

How will this project benefit the local economy?

Firehouse Commons will boost the local economy by providing affordable space for small businesses, creating jobs, increasing foot traffic, and driving further investment and involvement in La Crosse's Northside.

How will the project contribute to long-term neighborhood development?

By attracting small businesses and revitalizing a key location, Firehouse Commons will serve as a catalyst for further development, improving property values and encouraging long-term investment in the Northside.

What amenities will tenants have?

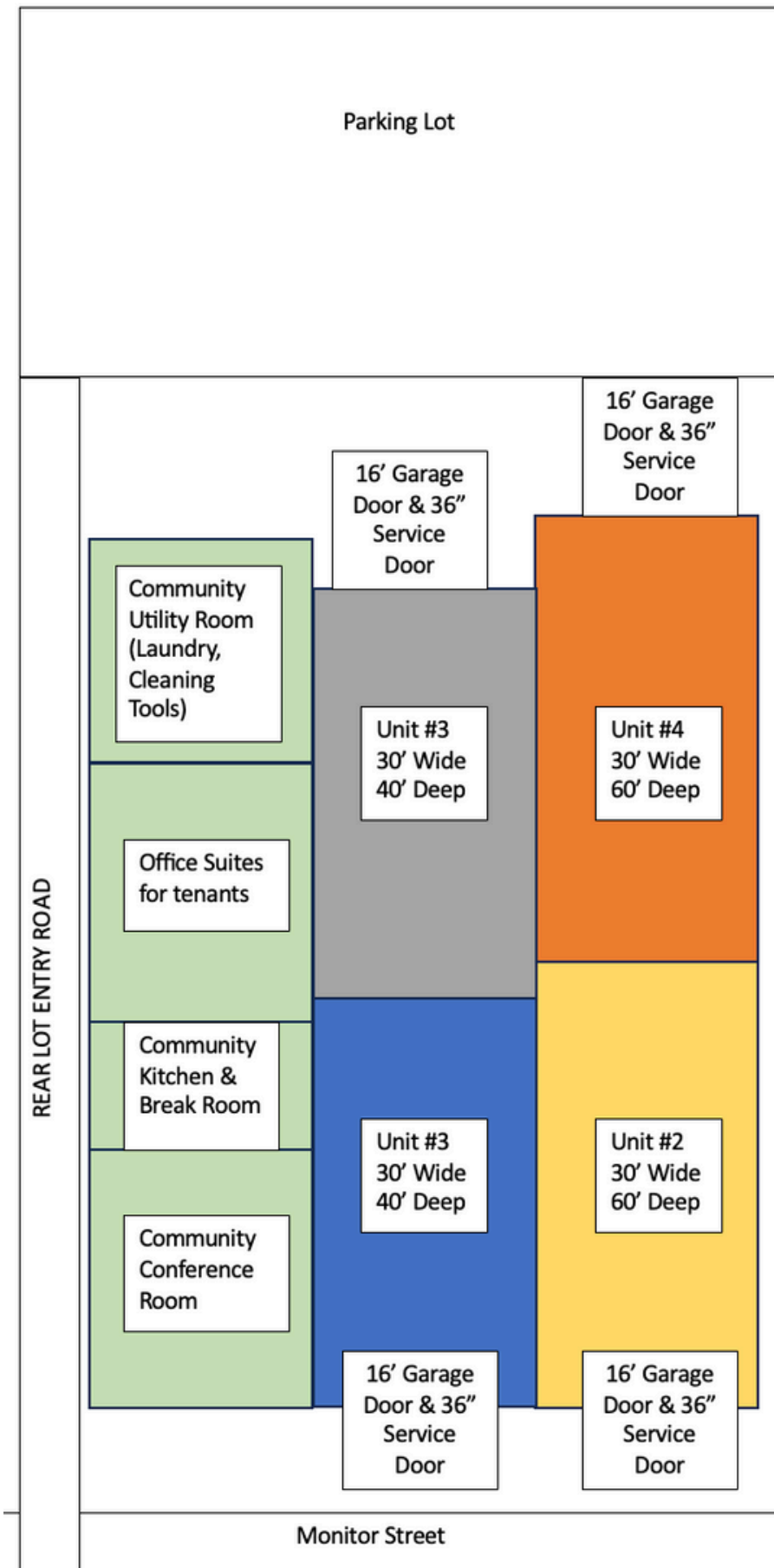
1.) Flexible Workspaces: A variety of spaces for small businesses, including offices, workshops, and parking spaces tailored to industries like woodworking, construction, and mechanics.

2.) Shared Creativity & Collaboration "Conference" Rooms: Fully equipped meeting spaces available for tenant use, providing a professional environment for client meetings and team collaborations.

- 3.) High-Speed Internet: Reliable, high-speed internet throughout the building to support business operations and connectivity.
- 4.) Loading Docks Ramp: Accessible loading facilities to support businesses requiring frequent deliveries or inventory management.
- 5.) Common Areas: Relaxing communal spaces to network and connect, fostering a sense of community among tenants.
- 6.) Parking: Ample parking for tenants and clients, with spaces for service vehicles, utility trucks, and equipment.
- 7.) 24/7 Building Access: Secure, round-the-clock access for business owners to manage their operations on their own schedules.
- 8.) Security and Surveillance: Security systems, including surveillance cameras and keycard/code access, ensuring the safety of all tenants and their equipment.
- 9.) On-Site Maintenance and Support: A dedicated maintenance team to manage the upkeep of shared spaces, equipment, and facilities.
- 10.) Break Room and Kitchenette: A shared kitchenette or break room where tenants can take a break, prepare meals, or enjoy coffee while connecting with others.

Conceptual FLOOR PLANS

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ALL WORK ADHERES TO FLOOD ZONE PERMITTING CONSTRAINTS

INTERIOR

Concrete Refinishing - 30,000
Interior Unit Divider 15,000
Utility Room Update 10,000
Community Office Clean Up 15,000
Conference Room Technology 20,000
Interior Total: \$90,000

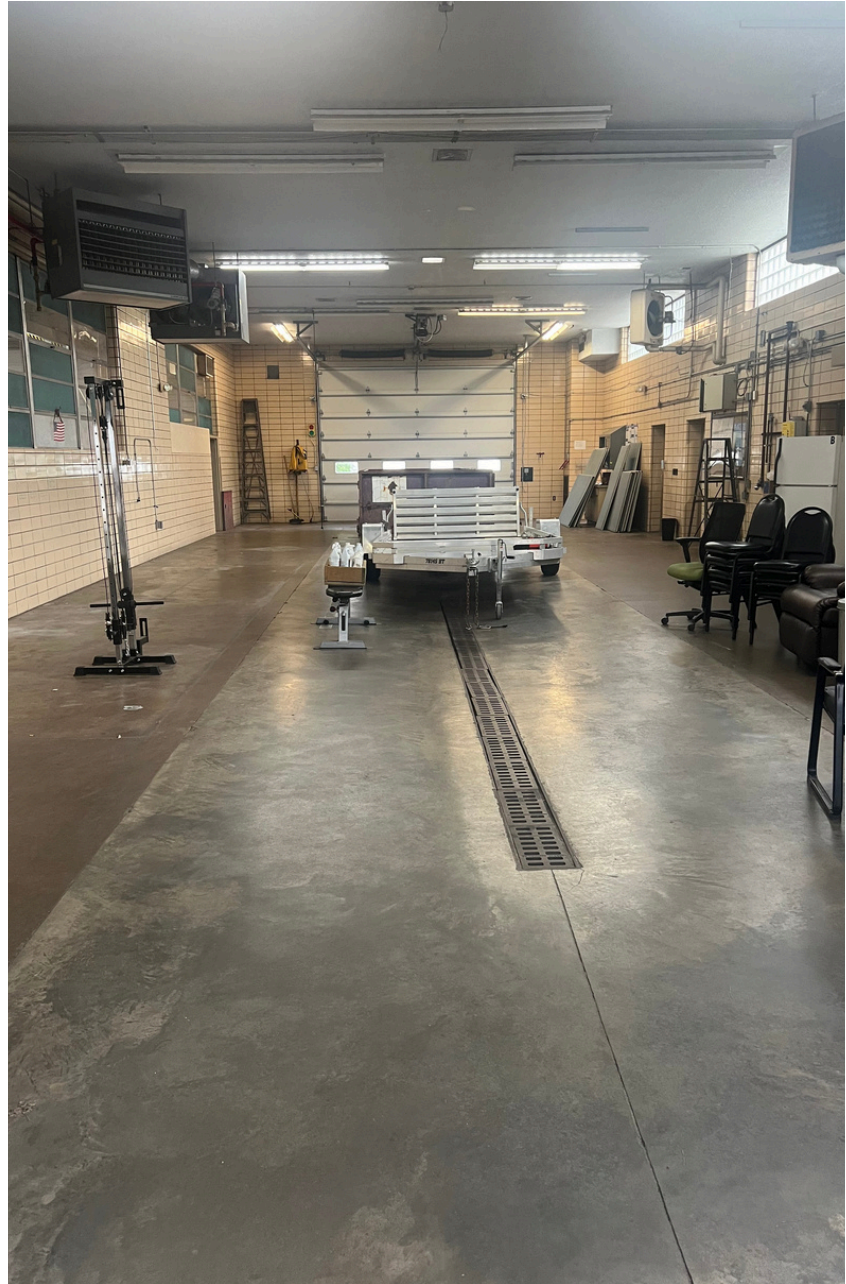
EXTERIOR

Surveillance & Security System 20,000
Parking Lot seal coating - 5,000
Exterior Painting & Clean Up 20,000
Exterior Total: \$45,000

Purchase Price: \$100,000
Renovation & Repair: \$135,000

Total

INVESTMENT: \$235,000.00



Other
**MEANINGFUL
DATA**

Tax Assessed Value: \$460,600
On the Tax Roll: \$13,818
New Rental Spaces: 4
New job creation: 16
New Tenants: 4

PROSPECTIVE TENANT SPOTLIGHT

A Legacy of Craftsmanship and Community



"So after 31 years we are closing the doors. For many years we asked and wanted to purchase the building. No option was ever given. The building was sold in April and our lease is up Sept. 30th. It has been a great ride but life changes. We want to thank everyone for allowing us to build so many wonderful things for them. We have met some amazing people and have some great memories of people and projects we have built for them. We might be back in a smaller scale but in the mean time we will take a month or two off and look and see what God has in store for us.

Roger and I (Mike) would like to thank everyone for their support over the years. We love you all."

We are excited to spotlight Realwood Inc one of the prospective tenants at Firehouse Commons. Realwood Inc, a beloved local business with a legacy spanning over 31 years, has been a cornerstone of custom furniture and cabinetry in La Crosse. Their motto, *"If you can picture it, we can build it!"*, reflects their dedication to creating one-of-a-kind, hand-crafted pieces that showcase their impeccable attention to detail and quality.

For decades, Realwood has been building custom kitchens, bathrooms, furniture, and millwork for homeowners and contractors in the area. Known for pioneering eco-friendly water-based finishes in La Crosse, they offer custom finishes in-house, setting them apart from other builders. From bedroom furniture to media centers, their craftsmanship has graced homes since 1992.

As part of Firehouse Commons, we see this as a unique and timely opportunity to help preserve this cherished business and keep a lost art of craftsmanship alive in our community with a space where they can continue their incredible work.

We would be proud to offer Mike and Roger a safe and affordable space, by welcoming their business as a key player in the revitalization of this historic building. We have been in informal conversation about a tenancy potential to create a win-win for all entities involved.



REALWOOD
PRODUCTS, INC.

PROSPECTIVE TENANT SPOTLIGHT

A Need for Small Business Space

As the owner of Property Reliance, a full-service lawn, snow, and property management company, I, Marty Walleser, understand firsthand how crucial Firehouse Commons is for small businesses like mine. Currently, finding the right space to grow and operate efficiently is a challenge for many local entrepreneurs.

Firehouse Commons would provide a much-needed hub where small businesses can thrive, offering affordable, accessible spaces to help us better serve the La Crosse community. It's more than just a building—it's an opportunity for businesses like mine to expand and contribute to the city's growth through meeting the needs of community members.



PROSPECTIVE TENANT SPOTLIGHT

A Family Business Eager to Expand



*"To our beautiful little girl.
Her Birthday is our namesake."



We're excited to spotlight 10-6 Print Shop, a dynamic custom printing and embroidery business that is eager to expand into La Crosse by potentially joining Firehouse Commons. Currently operating out of a basement in West Salem, 10-6 Print Studio has built a reputation for high-quality, custom-printed and embroidered products for local customers with a significantly quick turnaround and fair pricing!

Their services range from custom apparel to promotional products, offering businesses, organizations, non-profits, and individuals the opportunity to bring their designs to life with professional design. Known for their personalized approach and attention to detail, 10-6 Print Studio is looking forward to the opportunity to move from their home-based operation into a fully equipped shop space at Firehouse Commons.

This move will allow them to scale their business, expand their reach, and serve more clients in the La Crosse area, while continuing to deliver the quality and creativity they are known for.

CAPACITY

of the developers

MARTY WALLESER, owner

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Marty is a La Crosse native and successful entrepreneur with an extensive network of local businesses and personal contacts. Marty has a proven professional track record with the service and hospitality industry, as well as over a decade in property management.

He is a founder and active leader in the local Real Estate Investment Association.

**“THERE’S NO SHORTAGE OF
REMARKABLE IDEAS, WHAT’S
MISSING IS THE WILL TO
EXECUTE THEM.” - SETH GODIN**



Past Similar Projects

- Developing Partner of Hatchery in Riverside
- Founder of Walleser Investments
- Commercial property manager
- Landscape design & build contractor

Other Key Individuals:

- Waumandee State Bank
- David Holstrom, Architect & Structural Engineer
- Mark Radcliffe, Attorney
- We are grateful to the many supporters rallying for our ideas on new projects.



TIFFANY SMITH, MBA, ABD

Meraki Design Co.

323 Pearl Street La Crosse, WI

merakilax@outlook.com

**Current & Past Projects**

- \$1.5M downtown commercial historic tax preservation project
- Developing partner - Hatchery, LLC.
- 7 residential property renovations
- 5 historic home restorations
- Recipient of over \$300k in property improvement grants
- Founding Owner - Meraki Design Co.



Ten years ago Tiffany set a goal to own a downtown property. Not just any property - one particular property on Pearl Street! That goal was met 9 years 363 days later on July 21st 2020. She is currently working on a full historic tax credit preservation renovation in both buildings.

Prior to this work, Tiffany was the Director of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and the Master of Arts in Servant Leadership (MASL) Programs and an Assistant Professor at Viterbo University. She primarily taught market research, brand audit, and entrepreneurship. She also advised internships on real estate development & small business start-ups.

Meraki
DESIGN CO.

"IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO CREATE BEAUTIFUL SPACES FOR OUR COMMUNITY TO ENJOY." -TIFF

OFFER TO PURCHASE

The city's assessment values this property at \$460,600, with \$174,200 for the land and \$286,400 for the improvements. We understand we are offering a significantly reduced amount. This price factors in flood insurance, which is costly, while trying to keep rent affordable for tenants, and/or a possibility of future rebuild of the entire property. We're not just looking at the numbers—we're making an investment in the heart of this community. This building, once a vital utility, has been worn down by time, but it's far from forgotten!

Our offer allows us to channel the resources needed to breathe new life into this gem, restoring its place as a cornerstone of La Crosse's future. It's not just about fixing a building; it's about preserving a piece of our city's story, while creating opportunities for the next generation of local businesses to thrive. Let's give this building the care it deserves and bring it back to its full potential.

\$100,000
EARNEST MONEY \$10,000

We are including an escalator clause in our offer, asking for the option to increase our purchase price if higher bids and comparable proposals arise. This approach demonstrates our commitment to revitalizing the building for the long-term benefit of the La Crosse community and local businesses. Should our proposal be considered the most compelling, even with a lower initial offer, the escalator clause ensures we remain competitive.

Thank You

We would like to extend our gratitude to the City's Board of Public Works, the Planning Department, and City Council for their time and thoughtful consideration. We are excited and eager for the opportunity to revitalize this space, turning it into a hub that will serve local businesses and contribute to the growth of the greater La Crosse community. We look forward to working together to bring this vision to life and ensure it benefits the neighborhood and the city for years to come - **MARTY & TIFF**



FIREHOUSE COMMONS

COMMUNITY BUSINESS CENTER

MERAKI DESIGN CO. &
PROPERTY RELIANCE, LLC.

**SEPTEMBER 23,
2024**