

Name of Property

County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: La Crosse City Hall

Other names/site number: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing):

2. Location

Street & number: 400 La Crosse Street

City or town: La Crosse State: WI County: La Crosse County

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following

level(s) of significance: National Statewide Local

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
Tricia Canaday, Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Officer	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title:	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the county)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	Structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	Objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT / city hall

GOVERNMENT / city hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT / Brutalism

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: foundation: CONCRETE; walls: CONCRETE, SYNTHETIC; roof: SYNTHETIC

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The La Crosse City Hall is a large, Brutalist-style complex located in downtown La Crosse and built between 1968 and 1970. The city hall occupies an entire city block and is surrounded by parking lots and a landscaped plaza that was designed as part of the building. The city hall building is constructed of cast-in-place concrete with an exposed aggregate finish. The central part of the building is six stories tall with an additional mechanical penthouse. Lower one- and two-story wings radiate off the central core, creating a dynamic, irregular building massing. The La Crosse City Hall is significant under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture as an outstanding example of the Brutalist style. The property consists of three contributing resources (the city hall building, an associated garage building, and the landscaped plaza, counted as a site) and retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its significance.

Setting

The La Crosse City Hall is set on a full-block urban site in downtown La Crosse. The block is surrounded by multi-lane urban streets and bounded by concrete sidewalks on three sides.

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Adjacent development consists of commercial and institutional buildings. East of the property, across 7th Street, is a large parking lot and parking ramp belonging to Western Technical College. South of the property, on the opposite side of Badger Street, is the NRHP-listed Italianate-style Gideon C. Hixon House (NR ref. no. 74000095).

Exterior

The La Crosse City Hall consists of several distinct building masses whose complex, irregular appearance belies a highly functional plan. The central portion of the building consists of a six-story tower, containing a vertical core with elevators, restrooms, egress stairs, service areas, and a seventh-floor mechanical penthouse. Distinct office areas, each corresponding to a separate city department, are arranged around the north, south, and east sides of the core. (See Figures 3 through 7 for plans of the building and Photos 4 and 11 for representative overall views of the building.)

Additional lower building masses cluster around the base of the central portion; these building masses step back at various heights to create a complex building form. On the north side, a large one-story wing (originally the health department) projects from the central tower. Another one-story wing (containing the common council chamber) projects from the east side of the central tower; a portion of this wing rises to two stories in height. The south side of the building contains the two-story, self-contained police department. The police facilities also contain a covered and secure outdoor parking area on the south and a multi-car garage along the western perimeter of the property. On the west and east sides, concrete walls and a landscaped plaza extend the building onto its full-block site, and a small entry plaza is located on the north.

Despite its irregular form, the building has a rigorous design vocabulary and consists of only three building materials: cast-in-place concrete that has been sandblasted to expose its light-colored aggregate; windows with dark-colored anodized aluminum frames; and synthetic slate panels.¹ Throughout the building, the cast-in-place concrete is used in two ways: as vertical piers or as windowless wall planes.

Each distinct portion of the building is organized as a directional element (i.e. it has “sides” that are distinct from the “end” wall.) The structure of each building portion is expressed through prominent vertical concrete piers near the corner of each end wall. These piers are both taller and project further than the adjacent side and end walls. The concrete side walls are separated from the piers by a recessed vertical reveal, creating the effect of multiple layered planes. The end wall of each portion is recessed from the piers and consists of anodized aluminum windows arranged in full-width bands, alternating with synthetic slate panels whose dark color and taut texture deliberately contrasts with the light-colored exposed aggregate concrete piers and side walls. The same architectural vocabulary extends in a simplified version to the multiple egress stair towers located around the building. As subordinate elements, the egress stairs lack the prominent structural piers and consist instead of concrete side walls and synthetic slate recessed end walls.

¹ The building originally contained genuine slate; the original slate cladding was replaced between 2002 and 2004 with synthetic panels that replicate the appearance of the originals.

The entire building complex is unified through continuous horizontal expansion joints in the concrete. These expansion joints align with the base of the band of windows in each story and provide a horizontal rhythm to the tower's verticality. Similar horizontal joints are located along the top edge of the low walls around the surrounding plaza; here, the joints provide a human sense of scale and a unifying datum line throughout the landscape.

Each elevation of the building complex is discussed below. All walls and piers are cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete unless otherwise noted. As mentioned previously, the building is made up of multiple building portions, each originally containing a different city department. For clarity, the distinct building portions will be referred to by the original departments that occupied them. An explanation of subsequent internal rearrangement of department locations follows the narrative description.

North (La Crosse Street / main parking lot) elevation (Photos 1, 2, 3, and 4)

The north elevation contains, from west to east (right to left), the one-story former health department wing; the six-story central tower; and the one-story common council chamber. A sunken driveway is located along the western edge of the building and gives access to basement-level receiving and storage areas. An egress stair tower is located on the west end of the health department wing. This stair tower, like all other stair towers on the building, rises above the main body of the health department wing and provides access to its flat roof. The north wall of the stair tower (its "end wall" in the building's architectural vocabulary) is recessed and clad in synthetic slate. An egress door is located at grade and leads to the north parking lot. (Photos 2 and 3).

The health department wing is three bays wide. The outer bays project slightly and are treated as an "end wall," with prominent exposed structural piers that are taller than the main wall height. The area between the piers contains a full-width band of windows with synthetic slate panels above and below. (Photo 3) The middle bay of the three-bay health department wing is recessed and consists of a windowless concrete wall. (Photo 2) The walls and piers, like all others throughout the building, form a low parapet around the flat roof behind and are capped with flat aluminum coping. Another egress stair tower, identical to the western wall, is located on the eastern end of the health department wing.

Viewed in elevation, the eastern bay of the one-story health department wing aligns with the western bay of the central six-story tower, and the top edge of the health department wing aligns precisely with the bottom of the second-story windows in the central tower behind. This alignment is further reinforced by a horizontal expansion joint in the adjacent concrete piers and walls (a design element that continues around the entire exterior). The six-story central tower consists of two "end wall" bays separated by a deep windowless recess. (Photos 1 and 4) Each of the bays continues the same architectural vocabulary with alternating bands of windows and synthetic slate panels. The western bay is wider and the one-story health department wing projects from the base. The deep recess between the two bays of the central tower is clad in windowless concrete walls. Pedestrian bridges are located at the fourth and sixth stories between the two bays; these are expressed on the exterior as windowless concrete boxes that project from

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the back wall of the recessed bay. The recessed bay rises an additional story above the main part of the central tower and contains a windowless mechanical penthouse, clad in the same concrete walls as the rest of the building. (Photo 1)

The eastern bay of the central tower is narrower than the western bay and contains a two-story entry vestibule at its base. The vestibule has several sets of paired glass doors topped by a flat black metal canopy that spans the full width between the concrete piers. The front beam of the canopy bears the title "CITY HALL" in white letters. Above the canopy are double-height windows. Beginning at the third story, the typical alternating bands of synthetic slate and windows fill the upper stories. (Photo 1)

A small landscaped plaza is located in front of the north entry vestibule. The plaza is raised three steps above the sidewalk and parking lot level. A low concrete wall runs along the west edge of the plaza and extends beyond the shallow flight of stairs. At the outermost corner of the low concrete wall is a granite cornerstone bearing the name "CITY HALL" on its eastern face and the dates "JULY 4 , 1891 / JULY 4, 1970", corresponding to the cornerstone ceremony of the preceding city hall building and the dedication of the current building. The remainder of the plaza contains a wide concrete walkway, precisely aligned with the width of the vertical bay, and a square sunken planter bed with a concrete border and containing an ornamental tree. This sunken planter was originally a small pool and fountain that was removed at an unknown date.² A similar low concrete wall runs along the eastern edge of the small plaza. (Photo 12)

The common council wing is located at the eastern end of the building, and its north elevation consists primarily of windowless concrete ("side walls," in the architectural vocabulary of the building.) The common council wing contains three bays, corresponding to its roughly cruciform plan. The western bay is two stories in height (originally containing the city treasurer's department on the second story above the council chambers below). A single window is located in the extreme west end of the bay, and a symmetrically-placed egress door is located in the extreme east end of the bay. The remainder of the elevation is blank concrete. The center bay, corresponding to one of the arms of the cruciform plan, projects slightly and is lower. The taller volume of the common council chamber is visible behind the projecting center bay and continues eastward to form the easternmost bay of this wing. Visible at the easternmost end of the north elevation, in profile, are the structural concrete piers on the east "end wall" of the common council wing. (Photo 4)

East (7th Street / plaza) elevation (Photos 4, 5, and 6)

The east elevation consists of the central tower and the common council chamber; the east ends of the health department wing (on the north side of the complex) and the police department wing (on the south side of the complex) are also visible. The east elevation of the central tower and common council chamber are symmetrically composed. The elevation of the cruciform-plan common council chamber consists of a central "end wall" bay, with prominent structural piers, floating side walls, and a windowless recessed wall of synthetic slate panels. The center bay of the common council chamber is flanked by blank concrete walls. In the second story above the

² "A Dignified Landmark: Architects Wanted Distinctive Design," *La Crosse Tribune*, July 2, 1970, p. 22.

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common council chamber, the east elevation of the former treasurer's department is also treated as an "end wall," with structural piers, floating side walls, and a full-width band of windows and synthetic slate panels. The east elevation of the central six-story tower is visible above the projecting treasurer's office. The tower elevation is three bays as well and consists windowless concrete walls in the north and south bays and a central "end bay" with alternating bands of windows and synthetic slate; structural piers; and side walls that project slightly from the flanking walls. (Photos 4 and 5)

Also visible in the east elevation are the east ends of the one-story health department wing on the north and the two-story police department wing on the south. The east elevations of both the wings consist of blank concrete walls with a central egress stair tower with solid concrete east wall and recessed north and south walls clad in synthetic slate. The health department stair tower, on the north, projects above the roofline of the one-story building mass. The police department stair tower, on the south, stops at the same height as the parapet of the two-story building mass. The secure parking area located south of the police department wing is also visible; it is enclosed by a flat-roofed canopy supported on concrete piers with metal security fencing panels between. The roofed parking area is surrounded by a similar lower security wall with concrete piers and gate posts and metal security fencing panels with a driveway and vehicular gate in the east elevation. (Photo 6)

South elevation (Photos 6, 7, 8, and 9)

The south elevation contains, from east to west (right to left), the common council chamber, the six-story central tower, and the two-story police department. The south elevations of the common council chamber and the central tower are identical to the north elevations described previously, with the blank walls of the cruciform-plan common council chamber save for a single egress door and a single window at the east and west ends, respectively; a glass-walled two-story vestibule in the east bay of the central tower; a deeply recessed bay with windowless pedestrian bridges at the fourth and sixth stories and a seventh-story mechanical penthouse; and a wider western bay with alternating bands of windows and synthetic slate. (Photo 7)

Like the health department wing on the north elevation, the eastern bay of the police department wing aligns with the western bay of the central tower. The two-story police department wing consists of two "end wall" bays separated by a narrower recessed blank bay. An exterior egress stair tower is located on both the east and west ends; the western stair tower rises above the level of the main parapet to provide access to the flat roof. The first story of the police department wing is no longer visible due to the enclosed and roofed secure parking area. This secure parking area was added in 2018. The secure parking area is enclosed by concrete piers (that echo the architectural vocabulary of the original 1970 building) with security fencing panels and a flat-roofed canopy. (Photos 7, 8, and 9)

West (5th Street) elevation (Photos 9 and 11)

The west elevation is almost symmetrically composed and is nearly windowless. From south to north (right to left), the elevation contains the west walls of the two-story police department wing; the six-story central tower; and the one-story health department wing. The west walls of the police department and health department wings are blank concrete, with a central exterior

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egress stair tower in each wing, and the structural piers of the north and south faces of the wing visible in profile. The six-story central tower portion, which rises up behind the lower police and health department wings, is three bays wide. The west elevation of the central tower is three bays wide and is C-shaped in plan. The central bay contains a central blank vertical area corresponding to the location of the elevator bank inside. Flanking this are two narrow vertical strips of alternating window and synthetic slate bands; these windows provide light to the elevator lobbies. In the corners of each side of the central bay are windowless square vertical shafts containing restrooms in each story. The central elevator core rises above the main level of the tower and contains a seventh-story mechanical penthouse. The north and south arms of the C-plan central tower project from the elevator core. Their western faces are treated as “side walls” in the building’s architectural vocabulary and are blank except for the horizontal expansion joints that run around the entire building exterior. (Photo 11)

Although not visible when viewed directly head-on, the projecting building portions that constitute the west elevation contain windowed “end walls” that face into courtyard formed by the C-shaped plan. The courtyard elevations of the health department wing and the police department wing are similar to their respective outer elevations. The south elevation of the health department wing contains from west to east, like the north elevation, a wide bay of windows and synthetic slate; and a wide recessed bay of blank concrete which meets the west wall of the central tower. Similarly, the north elevation of the police department wing contains from west to east, a similar wide bay of windows and synthetic slate; and a narrow recessed bay of blank concrete which meets the west wall of the central tower. (Photo 9)

The western perimeter of the site is bounded by a tall concrete wall. Integrated into the wall, at the southwest corner of the site, is a flat-roofed police garage with four double-wide vehicle bays in its east (courtyard-facing) elevation. Each bay has a modern rolltop metal door. The walls of the garage are the same cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete as the rest of the building. A horizontal expansion joint runs along the top of the vehicle doors and continues around all four walls of the garage. On the west elevation of the garage, facing the street, in the band above the horizontal expansion joint, are metal letters reading “LA CROSSE CITY HALL”. (Photos 10 and 11) The garage is counted as a contributing building in the resource count for the property.

The remainder of the western edge of the property is lined by a concrete wall. The top edge of the wall aligns with the horizontal expansion joint in the police garage. These walls originally enclosed a grass plaza; a flight of steps led from the street-level sidewalk to the plaza. The plaza was altered in 2018 to provide additional secure parking. The level of the plaza was lowered to the level of the street. The interior walls surrounding the parking courtyard reveal the difference between the original lower part of the wall (which was originally not visible) and the visible upper part of the wall (which was sandblasted to reveal the exposed aggregate.) At the same time the courtyard was altered, the original plaza staircase and its side walls were removed and a metal security fence panel was installed in its place. (Photo 14)

Roof

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All the portions of the building have flat roofs. In 2020, solar panels were installed on a portion of the north health department wing; the roof of the common council chamber; and the roof of the police station wing and canopy. The solar panels are not visible from street level.

Interior

The interiors of the La Crosse City Hall constitute six floors of office and administrative space plus a full basement and a penthouse-level mechanical room. Character-defining features of the interior include the major public spaces such as the main lobby and the common council chamber; the functional arrangement of the various city department offices (developed over a multi-year period of planning and design); and materials and finishes including exposed aggregate concrete, ebonized wood slat paneling, and slate tile flooring.

As described above, the City Hall building consists of a six-story central office tower; a one-story health department wing at the north; the one-story common council chambers at the east; and a two-story police department wing at the south.

Basement

A finished basement level is located under the entire building apart from the common council chamber. Under the health department wing, the basement contains a large departmental storage area and the former receiving and mailroom. The portion of the basement under the central tower contains custodial and mechanical spaces. The basement of the police department is separate from the rest of the building and is part of the self-contained police department wing. The police basement includes lockers, classrooms, and an indoor firing range.

First floor

The first floor contains the main public lobby, the common council chamber, and office space in the police department wing and former health department wing. The main lobby is approached by two-story, glass-walled entry vestibules at the north and south. (Photos 15 and 16) The lobby itself is two stories as well, with original slate floors, cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete walls, and an acoustical tile ceiling. The east and west walls of the lobby are lined with ebonized wood information desks. The west side of the lobby is a wide corridor leading to the banks of elevators. On either side of the corridor leading to the elevator lobby are egress staircases and mechanical spaces. The west wall of the elevator lobby also contains restrooms.

The north section of the first floor originally contained the city health department, including consultation rooms and a laboratory. The space was remodeled several times, and when the health department relocated in 2016 to another building, the space was repurposed as offices and meeting rooms for other city departments. Although the wing no longer retains the waiting room, consultation rooms, or laboratory spaces associated with the health department, the interiors still retain the general layout, with a central corridor flanked by various office space, and many of the original materials and finishes, including ebonized wood doors and exposed concrete walls. The south section of the first floor contains the self-contained police department, which occupies two full floors plus the basement.

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The east side of the main lobby leads to the common council chamber. This large room was renovated in 2020 as part of COVID-era virtual meeting upgrades. The common council chamber has a semicircular bank of seating for alderpeople. The east (back) wall and portions of soffits have been replaced with modern wood paneling; these originally contained the same ebonized slatted wood paneling in the rest of the building. The council chamber retains its exposed aggregate concrete walls and its smooth concrete waffle slab ceiling. (Photo 17) The west part of the common council chamber (the former seating area for the general public) had retractable walls installed to make the space usable for small or large group meetings. These folding accordion-style retractable walls follow the structural bays of the room and the original space and volume of the common council chamber remains legible.

Second through sixth floors

The second story contains office areas, including a full second story of the police department wing, arranged around the central elevator core. A pedestrian bridge leads from the elevators at the west across the upper part of the two-story lobby to the former city assessor's office at the east, above the common council chamber. (Photo 18)

The third through sixth stories each have a similar layout, with three distinct office areas arranged around the central elevator core. The upper stories retain many of their original materials and finishes, including exposed aggregate concrete walls, ebonized slat paneling, polished metal elevator doors, and acoustical tile ceiling. (Photos 19, 20, and 21)

Landscape

The La Crosse City Hall building is located near the southern edge of its full-block site. The west portion of the site contains the walled parking courtyard, formerly a landscaped plaza that was altered in 2018. The north portion of the site contains a large surface parking lot that has remained intact since the building's construction. Immediately adjacent to the north elevation of the city hall building is the small landscaped plaza, described previously. The east portion of the site is bisected by a curved driveway that connects to Badger Street at the south and continues the curve of 6th Street. Between the east side of the building and the driveway is a lawn area that is heavily landscaped with mature trees and shrubs. The driveway is lined with angled parking spots. East of the driveway is a triangular plaza that contains grass, a number of trees, concrete walkways, and five seating areas along 7th Street. Each seating area is defined by a low exposed aggregate concrete wall that continues the architectural vocabulary of the main building (Photo 13) At the southeast corner of the city hall building is a walled plaza, with concrete walls and metal security fencing panels. This area was originally open and similar to the plaza at the north entrance but was altered in 2018 as part of the security upgrades at the police department.

Integrity

The La Crosse City Hall retains integrity in all seven aspects. The building has remained in use as the home of La Crosse's municipal government since 1970 the year of its construction. Changes to the building reflect continued routine maintenance as well as necessary security improvements, especially related to the police department. Major changes to the building include the construction of the secure covered parking structure on the south elevation of the police

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station wing, interior alterations to the common council chamber, and the replacement of the west exterior plaza with a sunken paved parking area. Other changes include minor interior updates to wall and flooring materials.

The city hall property retains integrity of location and integrity of setting as conveyed through its urban site, its original large north parking lot, and its original landscaped plaza at the east. Although the original western landscaped plaza was altered into a parking lot, the area retains its original concrete walls that define the perimeter of the space and relate to the design and materials of the main building. Similarly, the secure police parking area that was created in 2018 on the south side of the building is located on a non-primary area of the building and does not detract from the overall setting.

The building retains integrity of design as conveyed through its intact plan and exterior elevations, particularly the intact architectural vocabulary of structural concrete piers, broad windowless concrete walls, and alternating bands of windows and cladding panels. The building also conveys its integrity of design through its intact arrangement of interior spaces. Although the secure covered police parking area covered the first story of the police department wing, the original elevation remains intact, and the canopy and piers are sympathetic to the scale, composition, rhythm, and materials of the original building.

The building retains integrity of materials on the exterior as conveyed through its cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete and its anodized aluminum windows. The building retains integrity of materials on the interior as conveyed through its slate lobby floor, its concrete waffle slab ceiling in the common council chamber, and exposed aggregation concrete walls, ebonized slat paneling, and original acoustical ceiling tiles. Although interior materials have been altered, including paneling in the common council chamber and other materials in various department offices, the majority of character-defining walls and ceilings remain intact.

The building retains integrity of workmanship as demonstrated through its sandblasted concrete elements.

The building retains integrity of feeling as conveyed through its quality as a monumental public building in downtown La Crosse.

The building retains integrity of association and has functioned continuously as the La Crosse City Hall since its construction.

END OF DESCRIPTION, DO NOT DELETE

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

ARCHITECTURE

Significant Person

n/a

Period of Significance

1970

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Significant Dates

1970

Architect/Builder

Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates, architects
Roger Roslansky, designer
Peter Nelson and Son, builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. With its bold sculptural form, highly functional plan, and extensive use of cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete, the city hall is an outstanding local example of the Brutalist style of architecture.

Period of Significance and Justification

The period of significance for the La Crosse City Hall is 1970, the year of its completion.

Criteria Consideration (if applicable)

n/a

Narrative Statement of Significance

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated to the National Register as a notable local example of Brutalist architecture. Brief historic contexts follow for the City of La Crosse and its

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municipal government; a history of the subject property; a discussion of the Brutalist style; and a brief biography of the architectural designers of the building.

Historic Context

Present-day La Crosse is located in western Wisconsin, on a prairie flanked by tall bluffs at the confluence of the Mississippi and Black Rivers. The Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, and Sioux used the area as a meeting place and location for trade for centuries. When European fur traders and missionaries began moving into the Upper Midwest in the nineteenth century, the area became a popular location for fur traders, and a trading post was established in 1841 in a log building. In 1843, the post was moved to the site of present-day downtown and renamed “La Crosse” after the name of the field sport that Native Americans had played in the area.³

Within a decade, the settlement began to see rapid growth. The surrounding prairie proved to be excellent farmland, and the geographical advantage of the high banks of the Mississippi River made the location an excellent dock for river traffic and steamboats as well as being immune to flooding. River trade spurred on economic growth, and the population increased from 573 inhabitants in 1853 to 3,860 people in 1860.⁴ The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad reached La Crosse in 1858 and offered larger markets for the city’s industries of lumber and grain milling and brewing.⁵

The 1860s and 1870s saw the establishment in the city of large industries, railway lines, banks, local government, and an economy based on transportation and access to a large river port. Because of its river connection to the pineries of northern Wisconsin, La Crosse developed into a lumber boom town, with thirty-three mills located along the Mississippi and Black Rivers. Lumbering helped propel La Crosse into the second largest city in Wisconsin by 1880, with just over 25,000 inhabitants.

As La Crosse prospered, the city grew outwards from its location along the Mississippi River. Large residential neighborhoods were developed east of downtown, on a flat area between the Mississippi and the bluffs to the east.⁶ The 1890s saw a decline in growth due to the end of the lumber industry and a nationwide economic recession, and by the 1910s and 1920s, the economy of the city had completely changed, with the lack of both lumber mills and the end of widespread river traffic. Infrastructure such as paved streets, municipal electricity, deep wells and water works, a public health department and hospitals, large public schools, zoning laws, and a park system were all introduced by 1913.

³ Sanford, Albert and H. J. Hirschheimer, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1841-1900* (La Crosse: La Crosse County Historical Society, 1951).

⁴ Hessel, Susan and Gayda Hollnagel, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin in the Twentieth Century*, (La Crosse: La Crosse Historical Society, 2007); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *City of La Crosse Intensive Architectural/Historical Survey Report* (La Crosse: City of La Crosse Department of City Planning, 1984).

⁵ Rausch and Zeitlin, 17-20.

⁶ Rausch and Zeitlin, 20-23.

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The population of La Crosse reached 30,421 people in 1920.⁷ The 1920s saw a renewed growth in the city's economy and in residential home construction, due in no small part to increased enrollments at the La Crosse Normal School (the present-day University of Wisconsin-La Crosse), the Wisconsin Business College, and the La Crosse Vocational School.⁸ Other early 20th-century industries and businesses included implement and carriage manufacturing, button production, rubber boot and shoe production, and beer (and malt and soda products during Prohibition). By the early 1950s, several of La Crosse's larger industries were shuttered. The loss of these industries, along with a catastrophic flood of the Mississippi River in 1965, impacted the historic downtown industrial and business district, along with residential neighborhoods on French Island and the north side of the city. These events served as a catalyst for a series of federally-funded urban renewal projects in the 1960s and 1970s. In turn, the demolition of the city's nineteenth century courthouse, city hall, library, and post office under urban renewal inspired a historic preservation movement to preserve the remaining portions of La Crosse's historic downtown.⁹

Municipal government in La Crosse

La Crosse was incorporated as a city by an act of the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1856. Since its incorporation, the municipal government has been organized around a mayor and a common council made up of members representing each of the city's various wards. The city initially had three wards; in 1860, one of those was split to create a fourth ward. In 1871, the city annexed the neighboring Village of North La Crosse, which became the fifth ward. In the 1880s and 1890s, La Crosse divided each of its wards in two, and then redivided each of those wards in two again.¹⁰ After 1891, the city had twenty wards, ostensibly created to prevent political corruption since it was more difficult to pay off a larger number of aldermen. In the late twentieth century, the number of alderpeople was reduced to seventeen; since 2017, the common council has been made up of thirteen members.¹¹

When La Crosse was first incorporated, city government offices were originally located in the county courthouse. The city built a combination city hall and fire house in 1868 on the north side of Main Street between 4th and 5th Streets (demolished in 1995).¹² In 1892, the city constructed a standalone city hall building at the corner of State Street and 5th Street. The "new" City Hall was designed by local architects Stolze and Schick and built at a cost of \$54,000. The building continued to serve as the home of the municipal government until 1970 when the subject

⁷ Godden, Laura and Paul Beck. *La Crosse, Postcard and History Series*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *Historic La Crosse: Architectural and Historic Record: A Summary of an Intensive Survey Report*, (La Crosse: Architectural Researches, Inc. and Historic Resources, Inc., 1984); La Crosse Historical Society, *La Crosse, Wisconsin (Images of America Series)*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999).

⁸ Rausch and Zeitlin, 21-24.

⁹ Rausch and Zeitlin, 311-313; "Footsteps of La Crosse: Early 20th-Century Industry," La Crosse Public Library Archives.

¹⁰ Rausch and Zeitlin, 301-302.

¹¹ Brad Williams, "Yesterday in La Crosse: The 1973 La Crosse mayor race and the city's first female council member," *WIZM News*, Feb. 28, 2025; accessed from <https://www.wizmnews.com/2025/02/28/the-1973-la-crosse-mayor-race-and-the-citys-first-female-council-member/>.

¹² "La Crosse City Hall, Fire Station, Jail," Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory record #35003, 413 N. Main St.; "La Crosse's First City Hall is No More," *La Crosse Tribune*, July 25, 1995, A-1.

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building was completed. Following the completion of the subject building, the 1891 city hall was razed as part of an urban renewal project.¹³

The La Crosse City Hall: Property history

The La Crosse City Hall building was the result of a multi-year, multi-phase planning and design process. The La Crosse city government had been housed since 1892 in a Romanesque Revival-style red brick building with a prominent square corner tower. The 25,000 square foot building was a visual landmark in downtown, but by the end of World War II, the old city hall was regarded by many as outdated and too small. Even the *La Crosse Tribune* editorialized: "It is shabby, inadequate, some of its areas unsafe. The wiring is bad. Its stairs sound like the original soundtrack for Inner Sanctum. Vital city records would be lost in case of fire."¹⁴

As part of broader citywide redevelopment initiatives, in 1960 the Common Council hired the Newark, NJ-based planning firm of Candeub, Fleissig and Associates to produce a masterplan for redevelopment, including new zoning regulations, recommendations on downtown redevelopment, recommendations on industrial and residential development, and identifying areas and projects eligible for federal urban renewal funding.¹⁵ The planning consultants unveiled their recommendations in May 1961, among them a proposed new civic center. The "ideas only" plan included moving the existing Post Office, converting the old county courthouse to an art gallery, demolishing the old city hall, and building new facilities for city and county government offices. The Common Council and County Board both approved the plan, noting that the phased approach would "stop piecemeal development and offers plenty of flexibility."¹⁶

The county began planning for a new county courthouse and safety building almost immediately, and by 1963 construction was underway. The City followed the next year, and in February 1964, the La Crosse Common Council hired the local architectural firm of Hackner, Schroeder and Associates to study space requirements for a new city hall building. The firm presented their recommendations a month later, estimating that a new building would cost about \$692,000 for a "functional, efficient building, but not an ornate, elaborate one."¹⁷

Planning for the new city hall proceeded throughout 1964 and 1965. Hackner, Schroeder and Associates (technically only working as planning consultants) developed massing schemes for the new building based on size and functional requirements. As the project progressed, so did the scope and budget. It soon became clear that the new building would cost nearly four times the original estimate. The city began planning for a \$2.8 million bond referendum to fund

¹³ Rausch and Zeitlin, 302; Biographical/Historical Note, "Guide to the La Crosse, Wisconsin, Committee on Buildings and Grounds, Resolutions and Reports Relating to Buildings and Grounds, 1859-1932 (bulk 1874-1932)," La Crosse Series 025, La Crosse Public Library Archives and Local History Department.

¹⁴ Editorial, *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct. 20, 1966, p. 8.

¹⁵ "City Officials Say: Consultant Will Plan For Growth, Redevelopment Of Blight Areas," *La Crosse Tribune*, July 3, 1960, p. 5.

¹⁶ "Preliminary Plan For Civic Center Unveiled: Plan Approved By Commission," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 10, 1961, p. 1; "Ideas' for Civic Center," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 11, 1961, p. 1.

¹⁷ "New City Hall Cost Estimated At \$692,000," *La Crosse Tribune*, March 13, 1964, p. 9.

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construction of the new building. The architects also produced renderings and a large model of the proposed building to help convince aldermen and citizens to approve the bond financing.¹⁸

In August 1966, Hackner, Schroeder and Associates unveiled the model of a six-story city hall before the Common Council. The building had a monumental central tower flanked by lower wings that spread out into the landscape and rooted the building within its landscaped plaza. Architect Harry Schroeder told the common council that the multistory building was intended “to be a real landmark, a real contribution to the Civic Center.”¹⁹ The bond referendum passed, and with funding secured, Hackner, Schroeder and Associates (still only working as consultants) continued to refine the design of the building.

Preliminary plans for the building were nearing completion in early 1967. The new building would be substantially larger than the old city hall. Each city department had been asked to project how much space would be needed in 1985, and the building was designed to accommodate these twenty-year projections.²⁰ On Feb. 6, 1967, the Common Council approved the preliminary plans, and three days later formally hired Hackner, Schroeder and Associates as architects of record for the project and instructed them to prepare final plans.²¹ Throughout the fall of 1967, the architects met with various city departments to determine office layouts. Working plans for the new building were complete by January 1968. Construction cost by this point was estimated at \$2.29 million, in line with the original bond estimate of \$2.8 million.²²

While the City was planning its new building, other aspects of the 1961 Candeub & Fleissig masterplan were being implemented. The La Crosse Redevelopment Authority had been formed to oversee urban renewal redevelopment. The Authority was responsible for purchasing and/or clearing development sites with federal urban renewal funds, then reselling those sites to the final client. The City purchased the site for the new city hall in March 1968 from the La Crosse Redevelopment Authority.²³ That same month, the Common Council also approved the closure of Badger, Pine, and 6th Streets in order to create the large building site.²⁴

Construction bids for the new building were let in March 1968. Several building trades were on strike at the time, however, and most of the bids came in nearly \$500,000 over estimates.²⁵ Aldermen speculated that uncertainty over wage negotiations had caused some contractors to bid high because of unknown labor costs, and other contractors not to bid at all. The city modified the call for bids, including eliminating an underground parking garage as well as interior vinyl wall covering, and opened a second round of bidding, resulting in low bids of \$2,616,202 that

¹⁸ “Model Shown Of 6-Story City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Aug. 29, 1966, p. 9.

¹⁹ “Model Shown Of 6-Story City Hall.”

²⁰ “City Hall Space Estimates Increased,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Feb. 5, 1967, p. 9.

²¹ “City Hall Plans Approved,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1967.

²² “New City Hall Plans Ready In January,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Nov. 29, 1967, p. 20.

²³ “Proposals for City Hall Are Explained,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct. 8, 1965, p. 9; “Center Money, City Hall Site Recommended,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 16, 1965, p. 1; “Civic Center Plans Being Prepared,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 25, 1965, p. 4.

²⁴ “Fluoridation Referendum Is Rejected By Aldermen, Fest Beer Tent, City Hall Okayed,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 9, 1968, p. 1.

²⁵ “2nd City Hall Bids To Be Opened May 28,” *La Crosse Tribune*, May 13, 1968, p. 13.

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were more in line with original estimates. Peter Nelson and Son was hired as the general contractor. Other contractors included Healy Plumbing & Heating, St. Paul (plumbing); R.H. Lovold, Inc., La Crosse (heating); Winona Heating and Ventilation (ventilation); and Papenfuss Electric (electrical).²⁶

Construction crews began excavating the foundations in June 1968, and by July, footings for the massive concrete building were being poured.²⁷ Construction continued through the fall, but an unusually cold winter and rainy spring slowed progress. When the weather lifted, construction crews began working overtime during the week and eight hours every Saturday to make up for lost time. By July 1969, the building was up to five stories, and on September 27, 1969, construction crews “topped off” the building after the final cement on the seventh story was poured.²⁸ Interior work continued throughout the winter and spring, and the building was complete by summer 1970.

The new La Crosse City Hall was formally dedicated on July 4, 1970, exactly seventy-nine years after the cornerstone was laid on the old city hall that it replaced. At 9 a.m., former Mayor C. August (Gus) Boerner cut the ribbon to the new building; Boerner had served as Mayor of La Crosse between 1935 and 1939 and, as a five-year-old, reputedly had attended the dedication festivities of the old city hall in 1891.²⁹ The current mayor, Warren Loveland, praised the new city hall’s “kaleidoscopic” effect, saying that “whatever side you view it from it looks as if it’s a different building.”³⁰

The description was accurate. Architect Roger Roslansky, design director and newly-promoted firm partner at Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates, had created a building that was equal parts architecture and modern sculpture. A group of six-story rectangular prisms clustered asymmetrically around a central core. One- and two-story wings pinwheeled off from the main cluster. The building had an undeniable feeling of solidity and monumentality due to its massive exterior walls of sandblasted, exposed aggregate concrete; but the main lobbies and the office floors were surprisingly light-filled thanks to continuous bands of windows that filled the end wall of each wing, interspersed with bands of black slate spandrel panels.

Inside, the building continued the same architectural vocabulary, with sandblasted concrete walls and slate floors in public spaces. The interior also featured ebonized slat wall paneling, special carpeting that incorporated metal filaments to reduce static electricity, rosewood paneling and grasscloth walls in the mayor’s office, and a color palette of oranges, blues, reds, and greens designed by interior design consultants Westburg-Klaus Associates of Minneapolis. Despite the pitch-perfect 1970s color palette, the architects stressed that that they had tried to design a building with “conventional, durable, timeless materials” that were not tied to a specific era but

²⁶ “City Hall Low Bids Total \$2.6 Million,” *La Crosse Tribune*, May 29, 1968, p. 1; “City Hall Start Likely Within 2 Weeks,” *La Crosse Tribune*, May 31, 1968, p. 1.

²⁷ “City Hall Footings Being Poured,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 16, 1968, p. 6.

²⁸ “City Officials Tour New City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 31, 1969; “Topping Off City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 27, 1969.

²⁹ “Former Mayor Boerner, 86: 2nd City Hall Dedication For Him,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 2, 1970, p. 22.

³⁰ “A Dignified Landmark: Architects Wanted Distinctive Design” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 2, 1970, p. 22.

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rather would allow the building to be low-maintenance and allow the interior departments to expand as needed over the next decades.³¹

The building has continued to serve as La Crosse's city hall to the present with relatively few changes. Some departments have moved to different areas in the building, notably the health department, which originally was located on the first floor. Some original materials and finishes, especially the original vinyl wall covering and shock-reducing carpet, have been replaced throughout most of the building, but the public spaces and elevator lobbies retain their original character-defining materials of sandblasted concrete and ebonized wood slat paneling. Between 2002 and 2004, the original slate spandrel panels on the exterior were replaced with synthetic panels that replicated the size, color, texture, and joint divisions of the original slate.³² In 2018, the police department expanded their parking lot and built the existing canopy and secure parking area on the southwest corner of the site.³³ In 2020, during COVID-era shutdowns and social distancing, the Common Council chamber was remodeled to accommodate new technology for virtual meetings and to create additional flexible meeting space out of the former general public seating area of the large room. Other than these changes, the character-defining arrangement of interior spaces – and the striking exterior – remain highly intact, lending City Hall a high degree of integrity as one of La Crosse's finest Brutalist-style public buildings.

The Brutalist Style

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated to the National Register as an outstanding example of the Brutalist style of architecture. Brutalism was popular in Wisconsin between the 1950s and 1970s. Brutalism is most often recognizable by its extensive use of exposed concrete, often with rough textures or intentionally “unfinished” in appearance. Brutalist buildings also often have a rugged, bulky appearance and incorporate simple geometric forms and bold expression of the structural framing.

The term “Brutalism” takes its name from two possible sources: the *béton brut* (“raw concrete”) used by Swiss architect Le Corbusier; or a nickname for the first British architect who popularized the style. Several of Le Corbusier's most influential works in bare concrete included his designs at Chandigarh, the new capital for the Indian state of Punjab (begun in 1950) following the partition of India; the chapel in Ronchamp, France (built 1954); and the Unité d'Habitation apartment building in Marseilles, France, and the La Tourette monastery near Lyon, France, (both completed in 1956).³⁴ Around the same time, British architects Alison and Peter Smithson began using bare concrete as the basis for affordable, functional building during the post-World War II era. Peter had gained the nickname “Brutus” during university days owing to his resemblance to busts of the ancient Roman; the Smithsons later claimed the term “Brutalism” to identify their philosophy of design, which they described as “an ethic, not an aesthetic.”³⁵

³¹ “A Dignified Landmark.”

³² Building Permit Application no. Muni 2004-1, dated 3/2/04, on file at City of La Crosse Department of Building and Inspections.

³³ Building Permit Application no. 004789, dated 7-9-18, on file at City of La Crosse Department of Building and Inspections.

³⁴ Le Corbusier, “Le béton brut”, in *Le Corbusier: Ouvre complète*. (De Gruyter, 1995) pp. 180–189.

³⁵ Whiffen, 279-280; Banham, Peter Reyner. “The New Brutalism”. *Architectural Review*. 1955, 12, pp.354–361.

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Brutalist design in Great Britain by the Smithsons and others became associated with postwar civic projects such as public housing developments, hospitals, libraries, universities, and government buildings. Internationally, Brutalism became entwined with progressive ideals for civic structures, urban design, and housing: in Canada, in the work of Moshe Safdie; in Japan, in the work of Kenzo Tange; and across Latin America, Central Europe, and the Soviet bloc.

In America, architects often turned to Brutalism as a way of achieving monumentality. One architect whose work would have a significant impact on the development of Brutalism in the United States was Louis Kahn, whose 1953 design for the Yale Art Gallery in New Haven, CT, is considered a prototypical example of the style in America.³⁶ Other influential Brutalist buildings in the U.S. include Boston City Hall (Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles, architects); Freeway Park in Seattle (NRHP-listed, NR ref. no. 100004789) designed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin; and the acclaimed and highly influential Yale Art and Architecture Building, also in New Haven (Paul Rudolph, architect).

In the Midwest, notable examples of Brutalism include the NRHP-listed Riverside Plaza apartment complex in Minneapolis (Ralph Rapson, architect; NR ref. no. 100001090); the Cleo Rogers Memorial Library in Columbus, IN (I.M. Pei, architect); and the Northwestern University Library and the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago, both located in Chicago and designed by architect Walter Netsch.

In Wisconsin, like other states, the popularity of the Brutalist style coincided with federally-funded initiatives such as urban renewal legislation and redevelopment and postwar education construction fueled by the Baby Boom and the GI Bill. As a result, Brutalist buildings can be found everywhere across the state. Typical examples in Wisconsin include the University State Bank in Green Bay (1819 University Ave., AHI 24937); the Sentry Insurance complex in Stevens Point (1800 North Point Dr., AHI 217201); or Curtin Hall at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (3243 N. Downer Ave., AHI 220239).

Two of the best high-style examples of Brutalism in the state are found on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus: the Conrad Elvehjem Building (800 University Ave., AHI 79531), a warm, humanly-scaled jewel box of a building; and the neighboring Mosse Humanities Building (445 N. Park St., AHI 70069), a dramatic masterpiece of the style that has delighted and frustrated occupants since it opened. Both the Elvehjem and the Humanities building were designed by Chicago architect Harry Weese and both are listed in the NRHP as part of the Bascom Hill Historic District (NR ref. no. 74000065.)

All of these buildings illustrate that Brutalism, unlike some other architectural styles, is less a kit of parts and more a design philosophy focused on structural expression and honesty of materials. British architectural critic Reyner Banham, in his seminal 1955 essay "The New Brutalism," defined three criteria for the style: 1) Memorability as an image; 2) Clear exhibition of structure;

³⁶ Whiffen, 283.

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and 3) Valuation of material “as found”.³⁷ Banham’s definitions helped to codify the style, and his later monograph of the same title included examples of Brutalism from around the world.

In practical terms, the character-defining features of Brutalism all serve to reinforce what American architectural historian Marcus Whiffen called a style of “mass, weight, roughness, and solidity.” Brutalist exteriors are bulky and rugged, and the structural frame of the building is usually visible. Brick and stone are sometimes used, but concrete is the ubiquitous material associated with the style – concrete walls, concrete columns, concrete beams, concrete roofs. Brutalist concrete is always left exposed and is often rough-textured, either from the marks of the wooden formwork, or roughened afterwards with hammers, brushes, or sandblasting. Brutalist buildings often emphasize the contrast between broad wall surfaces and deep-shadowed openings.³⁸

The La Crosse City Hall exemplifies both the physical characteristics as well as the critical definitions of the Brutalist style. City Hall has a bulky, massive exterior, thanks to its fourteen-inch-thick concrete walls. The structure of the building is clearly expressed as tall structural piers and broad expanses of blank wall. Strong contrasts are created between the light-colored concrete walls and the recessed dark-framed windows and slate-colored spandrel panels. This contrast is repeated on a smaller scale at each corner of the building, where the thick walls are separated from the structural piers by a recessed vertical strip, giving the effect that the building is made up of multiple layered planes.

Throughout the building, the cast-in-place concrete is left exposed and is not covered by other finishes, stressing its “as found” character. The majority of the concrete in the building is sandblasted to expose the light-colored limestone aggregate, although interior ceilings in the Common Council chamber and other areas are smooth waffle slabs. Beyond its physical components, the City Hall is also a memorable visual landmark in downtown La Crosse – the first of Reyner Banham’s criteria for the Brutalist style. City Hall has a monumental presence, and its surrounding landscaped plaza provides a horizontal counterpoint to the complex verticality of the building.

All of these elements – its striking visual appearance; its clear expression of structure; its textured, cast-in-place concrete – make City Hall an outstanding example of Brutalist architecture in La Crosse and worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates, architects

The firm of Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates designed La Crosse City Hall. The firm was founded by Robert Hackner (1921-2016), who earned degrees in architecture from Notre Dame in 1942 and the University of Pennsylvania in 1948. Hackner opened his own office in La Crosse in 1953, and in 1956 went into partnership with Harry Schroeder. Schroeder (1924-2009) studied at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1948) and Rice University (1952). The firm designed a number of public and institutional buildings in La Crosse, including the now-

³⁷ Peter Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” *Architectural Review*, 1955, 12, 354–361.

³⁸ Whiffen, 279; “Brutalism,” (architectural style fact sheet), Wisconsin Historic Preservation Office, 2025.

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demolished County building; the city hall; the public library; the municipal airport; and several buildings at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse as well as several residential buildings for the La Crosse Housing Authority. The firm is known today as HSR Associates and remains in existence in the office building they built for themselves in 1972.

The chief designer of the La Crosse City Hall was Roger Roslansky (b. 1934). Roslansky studied architecture at Iowa State University and graduated in 1961. He worked briefly in Minneapolis after graduation and joined Hackner, Schroeder and Associates in 1964.³⁹ Roslansky was recognized as a talented designer, and he was promoted to associate in 1965 and then design director and partner in the firm in 1968.⁴⁰ Roslansky eventually served as president of HSR. He retired from HSR in 1998 and opened his own firm.

Comparative Analysis

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated as an outstanding local example of the Brutalist style of architecture. There are several other Brutalist buildings in La Crosse; the three best comparable examples are the La Crosse Public Library, the Dahl Family YMCA, and the La Crosse Masonic Temple.⁴¹ None of these buildings are listed in the National Register. The La Crosse City Hall retains equal or better integrity to all three comparable examples.

Dahl Family YMCA

The Dahl Family YMCA (148 West Ave. S., AHI 242976) was designed by architect Carl W. Schubert & Associates and built in 1969.⁴² The building is clad in a combination of brick and exposed aggregate concrete, used most visibly in the dramatic angled posts that support the deeply projecting second story. The YMCA has had two later additions: an 11,000 square foot addition less than a decade after the building opened; and another 22,000 square foot addition completed in 2017. While both additions (particularly the 2017 project) are sensitive to the scale, composition, rhythm, and materials of the original building, the later expansions have changed the original architectural character of the 1969 portion. In comparison, the La Crosse City Hall retains better integrity due to fewer exterior alterations. The City Hall can be considered a more thorough and intact example of the Brutalist style.

Masonic Temple

The current Masonic Temple (116 8th St. S., AHI 246702) was constructed as a 1971 Brutalist-style addition to an older Neoclassical-style Masonic lodge.⁴³ Designed by architect Carl W. Schubert (the same designer of the original YMCA building), the Masonic Temple has brick

³⁹ "Architects Are Named Associates," *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct 23, 1965, p. 8.

⁴⁰ "Business," *La Crosse Tribune*, Apr. 28, 1973.

⁴¹ The Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI) only classifies the Masonic Temple as Brutalist in style; the other two buildings are classified as "Contemporary." Additional searches of the AHI did not identify any other concrete or brick buildings that were of comparable scale or architectural finesse.

⁴² "Groundbreaking," *La Crosse Tribune*, Dec. 1, 1967.

⁴³ "Masons To Lay Cornerstone In New \$350,000 Temple," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 28, 1971, p. 11; Jeff Rand, "Neighbors Making History: Alexander Gordon & An Artistic Jewel," La Crosse Public Library Archives and Local History Department, 2024. The 1902 Masonic lodge, fronting onto Main Street and addressed as 724 Main St., has since been subdivided from the 1971 Brutalist addition and currently serves as a branch office of Ho-Chunk Nation.

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cladding with concrete window sills and front roof canopy. The building also incorporates deeply-set openings with dalle de verre windows (also known as slab glass or faceted glass), consisting of thick chunks of colored glass set into a textured concrete matrix. Despite its small size, the Masonic Temple has a massive, monumental quality that is typically associated with good examples of Brutalism. The La Crosse City Hall displays comparable integrity to the Masonic Temple. In addition, City Hall is on a much larger and more visible site, and its all-concrete exterior set it apart from the brick cladding on the Masonic Temple.

La Crosse Public Library

The La Crosse Public Library (800 Main St., AHI 238877) was designed by the same architects of the La Crosse City Hall (Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates), and completed three years before City Hall, in 1967. Unlike City Hall, the library is constructed primarily of a warm-colored brick that imbues the building with human scale and texture. The library is comprised of several distinct and interlocking building masses that are unified through a common architectural vocabulary of panelized wall sections, vertical slit windows, and ground-level “piloti.” At its completion, the La Crosse Public Library was one of seven libraries nationwide (out of 200 entries) to receive a citation of merit in a national award program sponsored by the American Institute of Architects, the National Book Committee, and the American Library Association.⁴⁴ Despite its unified appearance, the library was actually constructed in three phases, with later additions in 1980 and 1995. In its current appearance, the library retains its character-defining exterior elements. As of 2025, the library is undergoing an interior renovation to update classrooms, meeting rooms, and social areas, as well as to upgrade technology and connectivity. The interior renovations are not anticipated to significantly alter any of the character-defining interior spaces, including the double-height atrium or the functional arrangement of book stacks in various library departments. The La Crosse City Hall is comparable to the library in terms of integrity. However, unlike the library, the City Hall (with the exception of the recent secure police parking area) was constructed as a single building designed at a single point in time, rather than as later additions. Additionally, because of its prominent downtown location and larger size, the City Hall remains a more visible example of the Brutalist style.

Concluding Significance Statement

The La Crosse City Hall is a prominently sited visual landmark in downtown La Crosse. The building was constructed in 1970 to serve as the city’s third courthouse, and its functional design is the result of a multi-year planning process. The building retains a high degree of integrity to its period significance; and with its dramatic structural expression, its massive, monumental quality, and its extensive use of heavily-textured concrete, the La Crosse City Hall is one of the best examples of the Brutalist style of architecture in the city and is therefore worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Land Acknowledgement (will be reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral homeland of American Indians for millennia. From as early as the seventeenth century, Euro-American exploration and settlement, military campaigns, and government programs, all had the effect of

⁴⁴ “Miss Thurow Gets Award For Library,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 7, 1968, p. 5.

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repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of a new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin but others may not. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians.

Archaeological Potential (will be drafted and reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)

Preservation Activities

The La Crosse City Hall was evaluated as potentially eligible for the NRHP during a survey of La Crosse conducted in 1996; at that time, the building was less than fifty years of age and was recommended to be re-evaluated when it achieved sufficient age. Eligibility was re-affirmed in 2016.

END OF STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE DO NOT DELETE

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____

Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory

and/or Archaeological Site Inventory #: 79951 (City Hall building);
248419 (garage); 248420 (landscaped plaza)

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La Crosse City Hall
Name of Property

La Crosse County, Wisconsin
County and State

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La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

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END OF BIBLIOGRAPHY DO NOT DELETE

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property: 4.4 acres

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640821</u>	Northing:	<u>4853048</u>
2. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640980</u>	Northing:	<u>4853054</u>
3. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640986</u>	Northing:	<u>4852950</u>
4. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640879</u>	Northing:	<u>4852886</u>
5. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640823</u>	Northing:	<u>4852935</u>

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the La Crosse City Hall consists of a roughly rectangular shape that coincides with the current legal parcel, described as T. Burns, H.S. Durand, S.T. Smith, & F.M. Rublees Addition, all of Block 2; and the north ½ of vacated Badger St. adjacent on the south; and the west ½ of the vacated street adjacent on the east; excluding the north 14 feet taken for La Crosse St.; and excluding that part taken for 4th St.; and all of Block 7 and vacated alley; and the east ½ of the vacated street adjacent on the west; and the north ½ of that part of vacated Badger St. adjacent to Lot 1 on the south excluding the north 14 feet for the street (City Hall).

The boundary can be described as follows: beginning at the northwest corner of the property, the boundary runs east for approximately 505 feet. The boundary then turns and runs south for approximately 333 feet. The boundary then turns and runs west for approximately 215 feet. The boundary then turns slightly and runs southwest for approximately 224 feet. The boundary then turns and runs north for approximately 146 feet. The boundary then turns and runs west for approximately 188 feet. The boundary then turns and runs north for approximately 318 feet, angles slightly, and continues northeast for approximately 53 feet to return to the point of origin.

Boundary Justification

The boundary has been delineated to include the property's two contributing buildings, one contributing site, and the parking lot and historically and functionally associated with the resource. The boundary coincides with the property's existing legal tax parcel. The boundary is visually defined by the edge of sidewalk on the west (4th St.), north (La Crosse St.), east (7th St.), and a portion of the south side (Badger St. and 6th St.); and by the existing building face of the enclosed police parking area on the south.

END OF GEOGRAPHIC DATA DO NOT DELETE

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Justin Miller, Architectural Historian
organization: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Cultural Resource Management
street & number: P.O. Box 413
city or town: Milwaukee State: WI zip code: 53201
Email: jcmill@uwm.edu
Telephone: 414-229-3078

Additional Documentation

Figure Log

Figure 1. UTM map

Figure 2. Sketch map

Figure 3. Basement plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

Figure 4. First floor plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

Figure 5. Second floor plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

Figure 6. Third and fourth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

Figure 7. Fifth and sixth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

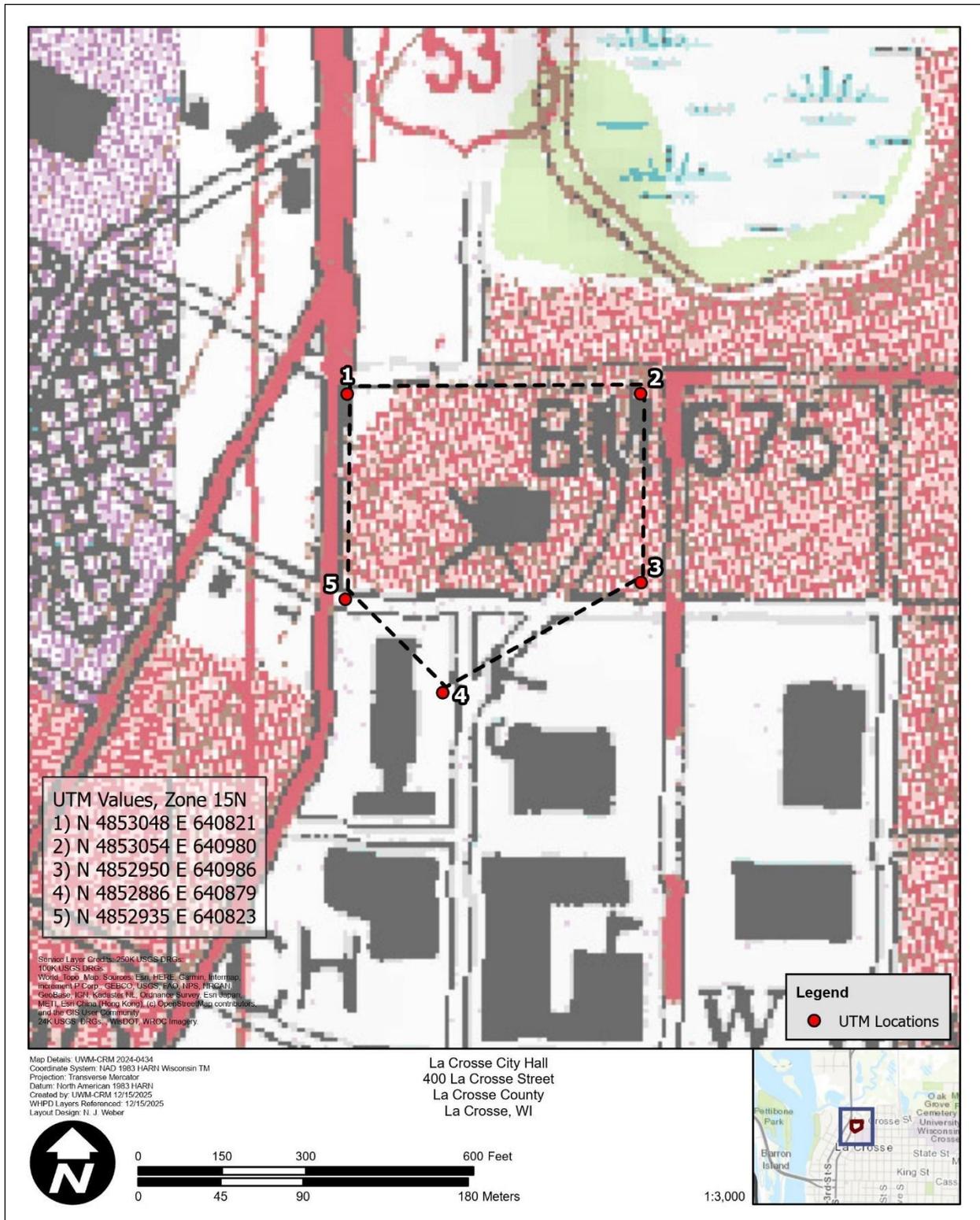
Figure 8. Photo key, exterior

Figure 9. Photo key, interior

Figure 10. Photograph of model, *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 25, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)

Figure 11. Architects' rendering of entry plaza, *La Crosse Tribune*, Nov. 3, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)

Figure 1. UTM map



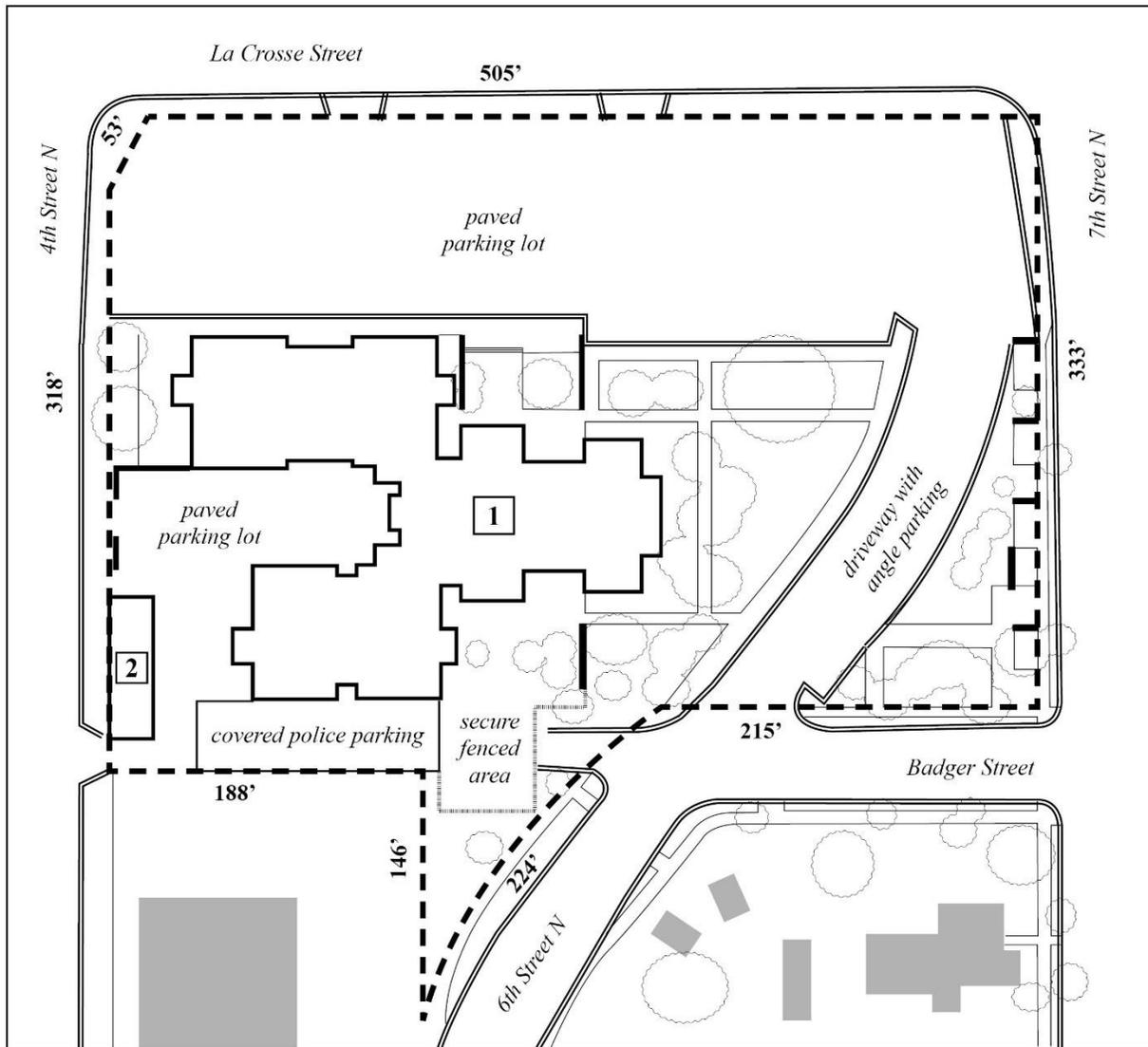
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 2. Sketch map



- National Register boundary
- 1 City Hall (contributing)
- 2 Garage (contributing)
- Plaza walls (contributing)
- Non-associated buildings

La Crosse City Hall
 400 La Crosse Street
 La Crosse, Wisconsin



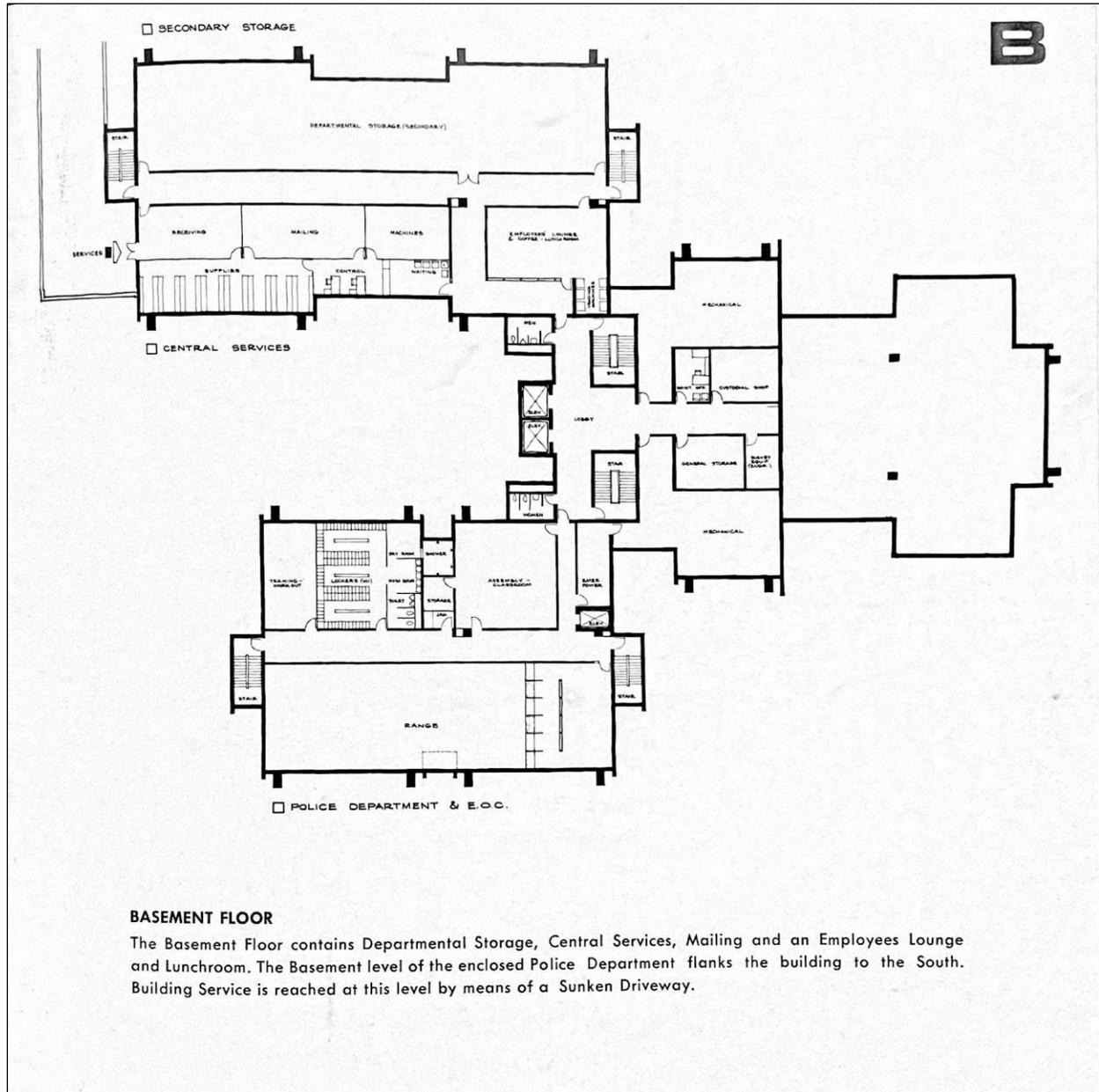
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 3. Basement plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



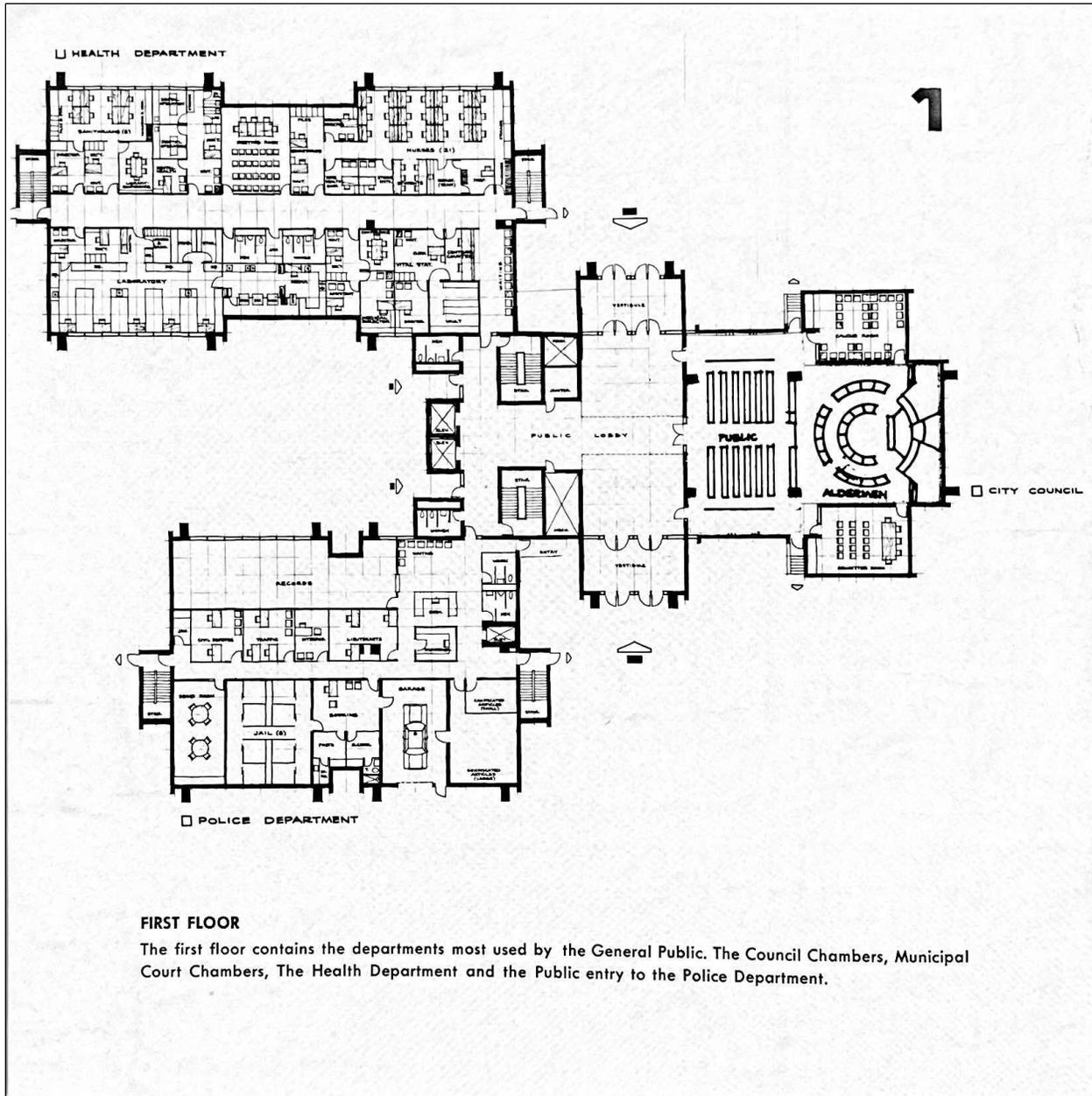
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 4. First floor plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



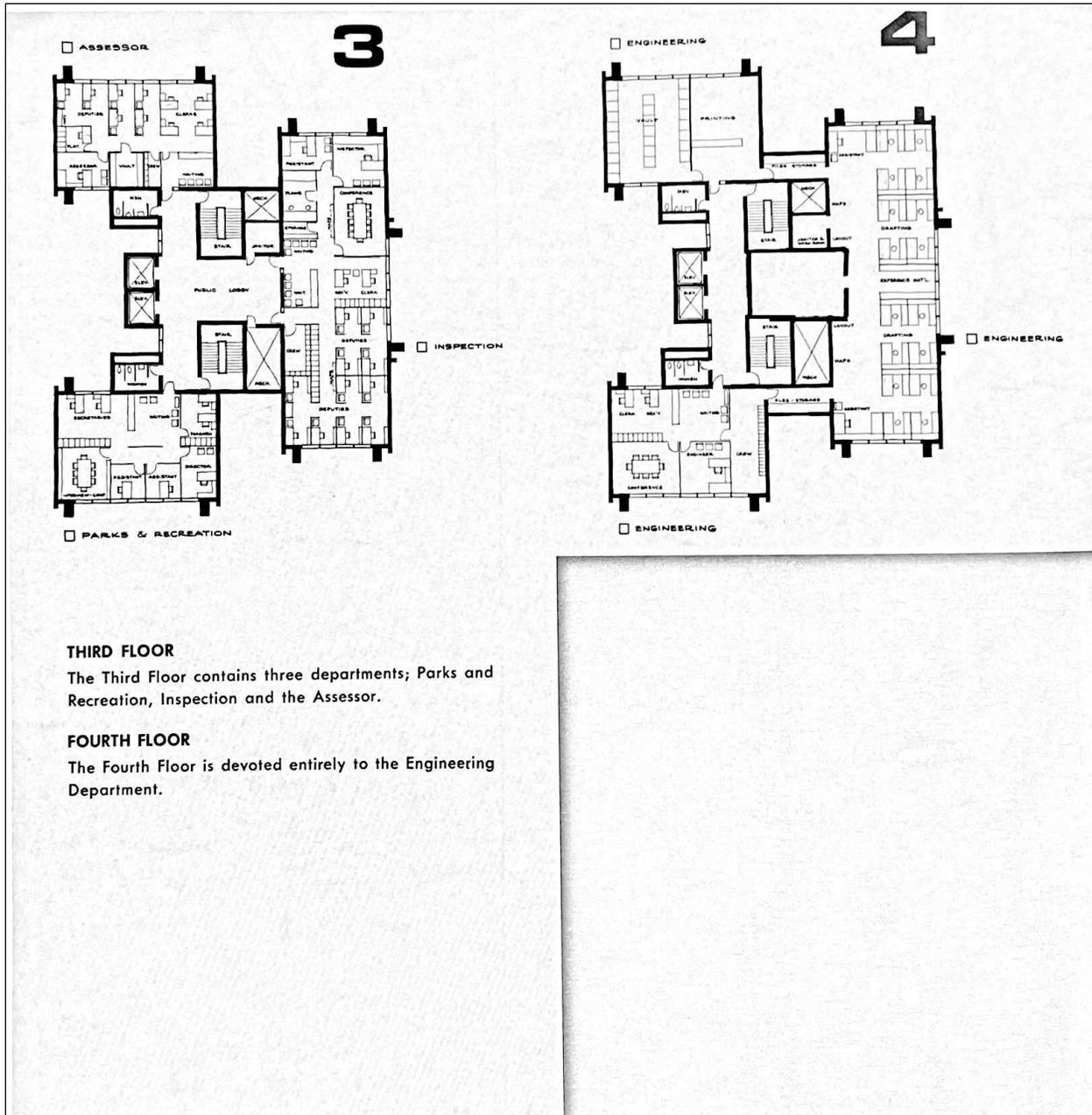
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 6. Third and fourth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



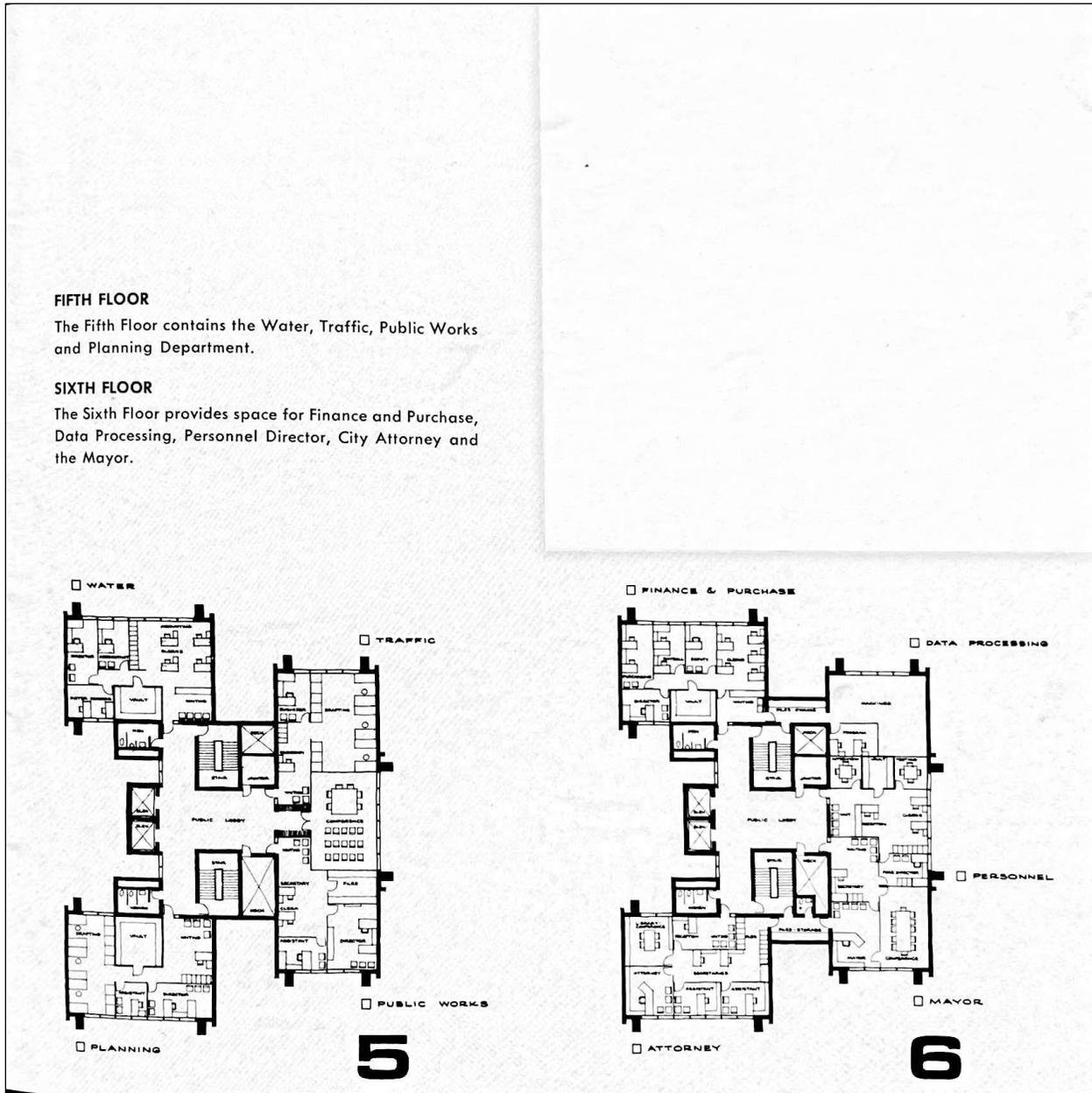
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 7. Fifth and sixth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 8. Photo key, exterior

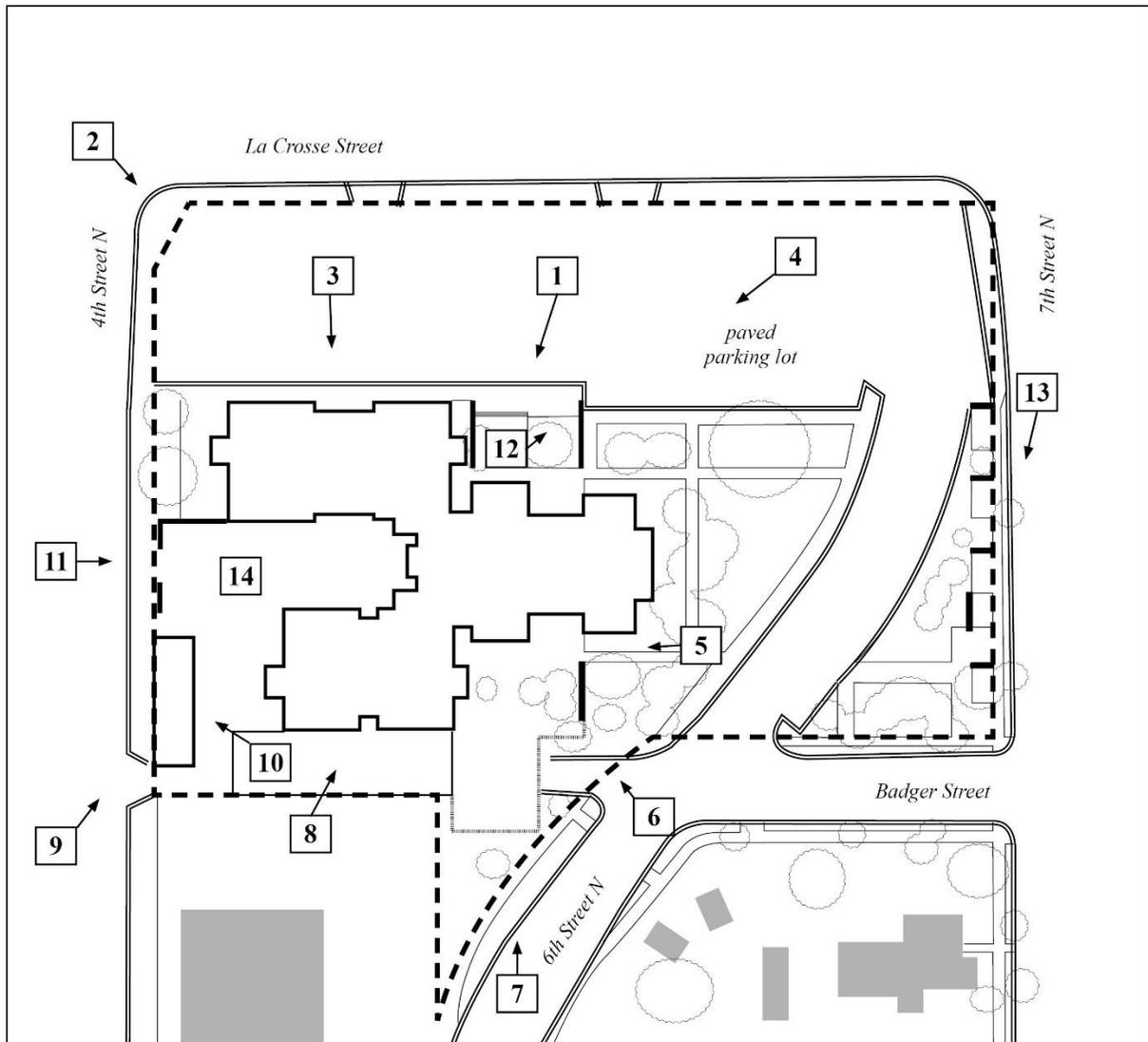


Photo Key - Exterior
La Crosse City Hall
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, Wisconsin

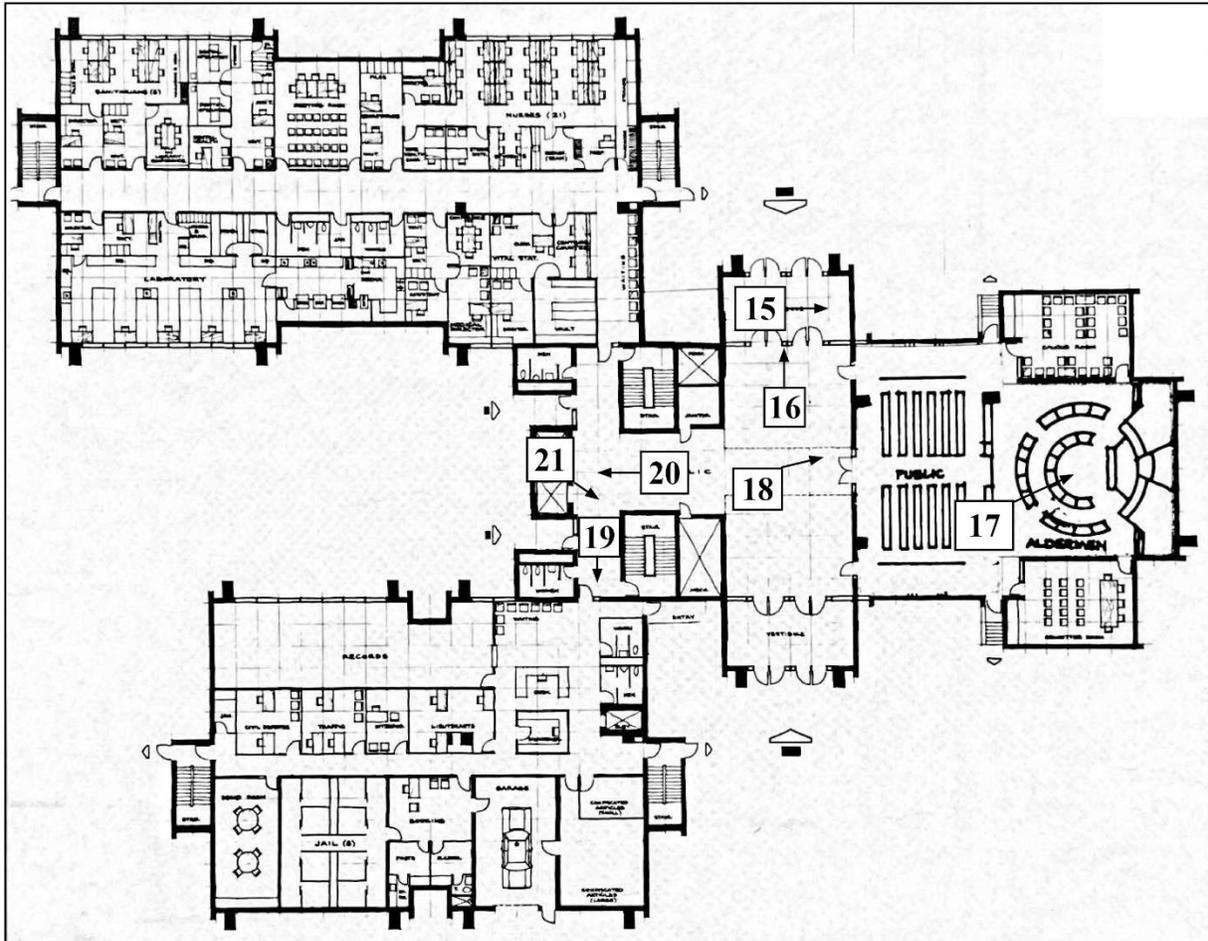
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 9. Photo key, interior



- Photos 15, 16, 17: First Floor
- Photo 18: Second Floor bridge
- Photo 19: Third Floor
- Photo 20: Fifth Floor
- Photo 21: Sixth Floor



Photo Key - Interior
La Crosse City Hall
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, Wisconsin



La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 10. Photograph of model, *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 25, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)



LA CROSSE'S NEW CITY HALL? 9/25/66

An architect's model of the proposed city hall for La Crosse, as viewed from La Crosse Street, is shown here. The six-story tower in the middle will house administrative offices, the 1½-story wing on the left will be the Common Council chambers, and the one-story wing on the right will house the

health department. The architect, Hackner, Schroeder and Associates, estimates the project cost—including architectural fees and construction—at 2.8 million. Voters Nov. 8 will decide whether the city will sell \$2.8 million in bonds to finance the project.

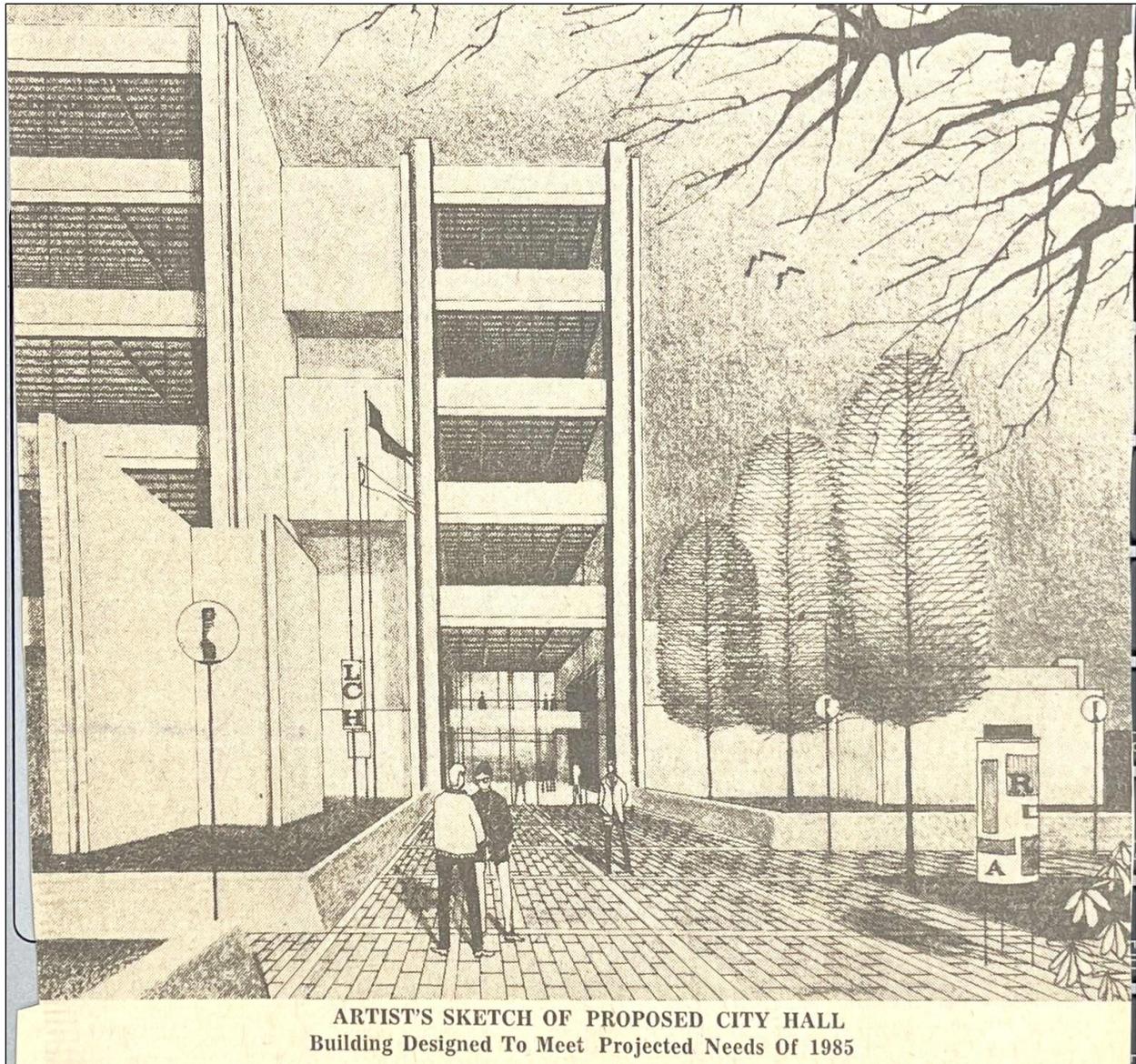
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 11. Architects' rendering of entry plaza, *La Crosse Tribune*, Nov. 3, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)



END OF FIGURES SECTION DO NOT DELETE

DRAFT

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once in the photograph log. The photograph order must correspond with the photograph log.

Photo Log

Name of Property: La Crosse City Hall
City or Vicinity: La Crosse
County: La Crosse State: WI
Photographer: Justin Miller
Date photographed: August 21, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0001
North elevation, looking southwest

2 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0002
Northwest corner, looking southeast

3 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0003
North elevation of former health department wing, looking south

4 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0004
Northeast corner, looking southwest

5 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0005
East elevation, looking northwest

6 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0006
Southeast corner, looking northwest

7 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0007
South elevation, looking north

8 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0008
South elevation of secure police parking area, looking northeast

9 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0009
Southwest corner, looking northeast

La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

10 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0010
East elevation of police garage, looking northwest

11 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0011
West elevation, looking east

12 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0012
North entry plaza, looking northeast

13 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0013
7th Street plaza, looking southwest

14 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0014
Concrete walls on west perimeter of site, looking northwest

15 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0015
Interior, north vestibule, looking east

16 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0016
Interior, 2nd floor lobby bridge, looking north to vestibule

17 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0017
Interior, common council chamber, looking northeast

18 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0018
Interior, 2nd floor lobby bridge, looking northeast

19 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0019
Interior, 3rd floor corridor, looking southeast

20 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0020
Interior, 5th floor elevator lobby, looking west

21 of 21. WI_LaCrosse_LaCrosseCityHall_0021
Interior, 6th floor corridor, looking south

La Crosse City Hall
Name of Property

La Crosse County, Wisconsin
County and State

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

DRAFT

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	Jim Flottmeyer, Facilities and Marine Operations Manager		
organization	City of La Crosse, Parks & Rec Division	date	Dec. 4, 2025
street & number	400 La Crosse Street	phone	608-789-7559
city or town	La Crosse	state	WI
		zip code	54623

If there are other interested parties that should be noticed, please provide in the tables below

name/title	Tim Acklin, Deputy Director, Planning and Development		
organization	City of La Crosse	date	Dec. 4, 2025
street & number	400 La Crosse St.	phone	608-789-7391
city or town	La Crosse	state	WI
		zip code	54623

name/title	_____		
organization	_____	date	_____
street & number	_____	phone	_____
city or town	_____	state	WI
		zip code	_____

name/title	_____		
organization	_____	date	_____
street & number	_____	phone	_____
city or town	_____	state	WI
		zip code	_____

