

TO: Economic and Community Development Commission

FROM: Catherine Roraff
1649 Park Avenue, La Crosse, WI 54601

DATE: April 21, 2024

SUBJECT: Support for Reuse of South Community Library Building
at 1307 16th St. South

My parents built the home at 1649 Park Avenue and occupied it in August of 1950 (from a home at 1539 Denton St). As a 9 month old infant I don't remember moving in but I do remember getting my library card when the Library first opened. When the Head Librarian came to my kindergarten class to sign up my classmates for cards, she couldn't believe I was only 5 since I had been checking books out for "at least a couple of years".

The Library acted as a focal point for the families in and around it for blocks in all directions. It was where we went to vote, to research new developments, to read other newspapers and magazines and to work our first job (I was 14 when I started). The land behind the Library wasn't always such a nice park. I remember sand burrs and mud puddles, but it attracted plenty of kids from the neighborhood for bike riding, playing ball, flying kites and later, using the swings.

When asked where I lived, I always responded, by the South Branch Library! It identified the area. That would be lost if the building was torn down and with it a valuable part of La Crosse neighborhoods' history. If the building was falling down and in need of extensive repairs, I might feel differently but the building is in very usable shape and can be repurposed. There are a number of proposals submitted which would do just that. **I wholly support the idea of saving the building and reusing it for another purpose.**

I have significant concerns about the building of homes on the existing land. There is a significant number of homes in the immediate neighborhood with single car garages. This results in many cars which are regularly parked on the surrounding streets. The current lot on the south end of the Library land is usually full when any event is held at the school or the church. If that lot is removed, more cars would end up on the streets and would, most likely, make exiting from those homes' garages/parking spaces more difficult. If there are designated parking spaces, not in a garage or immediately adjacent to the home, those spaces may be taken by visitors to the school/church or park. Just talk to people in the UW-L area regarding their parking problems.

Community development, in this case, community or neighborhood identity seems to be running second to economic development. I understand the need for additional tax base, but not if it would compromise the neighborhood feel of the area. In my opinion, it could also reduce the use of the park and may open the park area to activity which could be detrimental to the neighborhood.

I appreciate the Commission accepting input from the neighborhood residents and hope you will give our comments due consideration in your decision.