

Karl & Grace Green  
1003 King Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

Re: REACH center TND Rezoning Opposition

I am writing to voice my opposition over the proposed TND rezoning which CouleeCap/YWCA/Scenic Bluffs is requesting. As a neighbor to the REACH center, I was initially hesitant to approve the REACH center when originally proposed back in 2021 at a public listening session. However, the project was communicated to the neighborhood at the public listening session as **a temporary location**. Due to the temporary nature of what was proposed, and the importance of the work CouleeCap performs, I tentatively supported.

The commercial building at 212 S. 11<sup>th</sup> street does not fit the historical texture and design of the Washburn Neighborhood or the adjacent historical district (for which it directly abuts). For the past 20 plus years the Washburn Neighborhood has been advocating for more housing opportunities in this neighborhood. This was recorded in the 2002 and 2023 City of La Crosse Comprehensive Plans. The 2023 Comprehensive Plan's future land use map indicates the parcels of 212 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street as Washburn Residential. What it does not indicate is for Commercial rezoning, or even Traditional Neighborhood Development rezoning.

Wisconsin State Statutes 66.1001(3) states: "Ordinances that must be consistent with Comprehensive Plan (beginning on 1/1/2010, if a local government unit enacts or amends any of the following ordinances, the ordinance shall be consistent with that local government unit's comprehensive plan".... (k) City or village zoning ordinances enacted or amended under statute 62.23(7).

In my opinion, even though some Traditional Neighborhood Development construction in practice could develop buildings that may fit into the design and character of the neighborhood, the proposed renovations and rezoning is not consistent with the neighborhood's vision. Neighborhood feedback that was recorded in the 2002 and 2023 Comprehensive Plans will not be followed if this rezoning is approved, thus creating inconsistency between the Comprehensive Plan and the proposed amended zoning code.

Washburn Residents that participated in the 2023 Comprehensive Plan development would have labelled the future land use map as Traditional Neighborhood Development if that was what was desired. That was not what was desired, rather Washburn residential zoning/development was desired for the 212 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street parcels. By allowing TND zoning to move through, the City will be amending its zoning code inconsistent to the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.

Another reason for the opposition neighborhood attendees brought up is the concern over the high volume of social service centers such as Ophelia's House, Salvation Army of La Crosse County, YMCA Teen Center, Coulee Recovery Center, and several half-way houses. In the past, Washburn Neighborhood has received many social service organizations. I know these organizations are necessary for a community, but why do so many end up in Washburn Neighborhood?

City Planning maps (attached) illustrate part of the reason. Washburn has a majority of rental compared to owner-occupied residence. Speaking very generally, renters in Washburn neighborhood tend to be

younger, and seem to be more transient than many homeowners. This is most noted during the months of May and June when we annually see the move-out and move-in of neighbors on a yearly basis. Again, this is speaking very generally.

In 2010 , UW Extension- La Crosse County authored a report on the importance of housing and housing values to the City of La Crosse's financial capacity. La Crosse does not have a high volume of higher-end housing, thus leading in part to high property taxes. To summarize, the City of La Crosse has the lowest value per capita of housing values in La Crosse County, and even the state when compared to similar sized communities. This leads to high property taxes because people demand city services, and the less value per person a city has to spread the cost of those service demands over will lead to higher taxes per capita.

Unfortunately, this has led to decades of families leaving the City of La Crosse for newer housing with lower property taxes in adjacent municipalities in La Crosse, Vernon and Houston counties. One resulting impact of this is less enrollment in neighborhood schools. Just this year we saw the La Crosse School District create the Facility Advisory Committee, a group of School District citizens tasked with determining the best schools to close to reduce operation expenses of the school district following decades of declining enrollment. I served on this committee, and recognized one impression that has stuck with me – municipalities control how and where development occurs, and school districts are left with the impacts/consequences.

Many homeowners in the Washburn Neighborhood refuse to take part in this unsustainable national trend of hollowed out cities for suburban living. I believe in the importance of neighborhoods with a mix of incomes and backgrounds. An economically mixed neighborhood is an important fabric of a community that helps provide all residents with exposure to people from various walks of life. Suburban neighborhoods do not tend to have this form of economic diversification of residents because new suburban homes are built at specific price points meant to attract residents of similar economic backgrounds. We see this over and over with neighborhoods full of middle and upper income residents in new suburban developments.

In 2014 UW Extension coordinated a housing survey of employees in Mayo Health System, Gundersen Health System, UW-La Crosse, and City and County work staff. This survey received just under 4,000 responses – making the resulting data statistically representative of the five organizations represented (slightly over 8,000 employees in total).

Non-City of La Crosse residents (employed at one of these five large employers) ranked the three most important factors they consider when choosing their next homes; those being:

- Perceptions of crime in the neighborhood,
- The existing conditions of the neighborhood, and
- The amount of property taxes.

This was consistent regardless of age, income or educational attainment of the survey taker.

You may ask, “Why do I think the REACH center would negatively impact the neighborhood”. It is not that I think the Center changes the safety of our neighborhood all that much; however what it does change is the perception of safety/crime in the neighborhood for potential future residents.

I believe the City Council needs to recognize the importance of its City neighborhoods, and how they need to be a blend/balance of rental and home owners. A balance that provides opportunity and breeds

future success for its residents. As it is, Washburn Neighborhood is one of the most economically mixed neighborhoods in the City of La Crosse, and I would argue even La Crosse County.

During the initial discussions with the Washburn Neighborhood (2021 I believe), CouleeCap presented its plans for the REACH center, telling the crowd that the location was temporary. In 2022 the property at 212 11<sup>th</sup> street north was assessed at \$914,500, and had property taxes due in the amount of \$35,071.34. Unfortunately, once Coulee Cap retained ownership the property tax status was changed from G2 (commercial) to X4 (Other i.e. tax-exempt). This essentially shifted \$35,071.34 tax dollars due from CouleeCap to every other taxpayer in the City of La Crosse. This intent to change from commercial to tax-exempt status **was not mentioned** during the Washburn Neighborhood informative meetings.

Thank you for your time.

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Thank you for your consideration. I appreciate your service to the City!

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