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To: Dickinson, Tamra; Goggin, Erin; Janssen, Barb; Slezniow, Larry; Hameister, Jenasea; Kahlow, Chris; Kiel, Mac; Mindel, Mackenzie; Schwarz, Rebecca; Trost, Jennifer; Happel, Douglas; Neumann, Mark; ZZ City Clerk External
Subject: In opposition to 24-0068 (UWL parking ramp)

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In opposition to 24-0068 (UWL parking ramp)

Allowing the construction of this parking ramp is the opposite of what we should be doing. We need to reduce our car use for both environmental and economic reasons, and adding parking capacity is foolish when there are other options which UWL is not pursuing.

According to the Climate Action Plan, 34% of La Crosse's greenhouse gas emissions are caused by transportation. In order to reduce these emissions, we need to get people out of their cars. The City of La Crosse currently spends about 1/4 of its budget on the Streets department. This is because La Crosse has far lower population density than it had prior to the 1950s (about 7000 per square mile then compared to less than 4000 today). This low population density undercuts the bus system and increases the cost of city services- most directly streets, but also things like emergency services, which consequently need more stations per resident in order to maintain response times, for just one example of the many, many ways that low density costs us money.

UWL is neglecting, or even actively impeding, other ways of handling transportation. The removal of the bus route from the middle of campus was a serious blow to the ease with which students could access mass transit. That's difficult to reverse at this point, since there's now a pedestrian mall where the route went, but it's an example of UWL making poor choices. More to the point, UWL fails to take meaningful steps to get students to use the bus. Students are not trained on the bus system as part of orientation, for example. This isn't helped by the fact that the MTU route map is confusing and lacks an overnight route, which is something that the city should correct ASAP.

Most fundamentally, the vast majority of students shouldn't be driving. Very few students who live on or near campus should need to own a car. Walking ten blocks takes only twenty minutes, and farther than that should mean a bus ride. There may be students who have no other good transportation options or who need a car due to having a distant job, a need for frequent travel, children who make a car necessary for one reason or another, a disability which justifies car ownership, etc. However, the UWL parking permit application process does not prioritize these individuals, meaning many people in the current parking waiting list may fall into these categories while some who do not have a parking spot which is merely a convenient luxury for them. If UWL collects statistics on this information, I would love to see it, but I suspect they don't.

Finally, parking hurts the rest of the city by normalizing car use. When someone has a car already, it becomes more convenient for them to drive than to use the bus system. This adds pressure to the roads and parking in the rest of the city.

Rather than building a parking ramp, UWL should alleviate its parking problems by building a dorm on this lot instead. Based on the square footage of the lot compared to the footprint plus curtilage of other UWL dorms and their capacity, this lot could reasonably house 300 students. In contrast to harming the city by building more parking, more housing would bring rent prices down for all city residents. UWL should also take the aforementioned steps to encourage bus use and restrict parking permits based on need. The City can facilitate this by changing the bus system to be more intuitive and faster with routes that go in straight lines, and adding at least some city-wide overnight service.

UWL has been building parking ramps for a long time and it hasn't solved the parking problems. It's time for us to put our foot down and tell the university to come up with some strategies that might actually work, instead of doing the same thing over and over again and acting bewildered when it fails again.

