



TO: ALL NEWS MEDIA

FROM: MAYOR MITCH REYNOLDS

DATE: JANUARY 6, 2022

RE: STATEMENT ON CONTINUING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

An inevitable outcome of highlighting increased City of La Crosse efforts to address homelessness is the reasonable concerns from community members on achieving measurable results. A recent event has sparked new concerns but has not changed the ultimate goal of effectively ending homelessness in our community.

Over the last few years, La Crosse—as many other cities around the nation—has witnessed a dramatic increase in the numbers of individuals and families who are either unsheltered or at the risk of homelessness. While this increase was occurring prior to the onset of the global pandemic, COVID-19 certainly exacerbated the situation.

In December, executive committees for the city council and county board gathered in a historic joint meeting to consider the purchase of a property near La Crosse City Hall. This property—current home to the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce—would provide immediate space from which service providers could address various needs and adequate future space to construct bridge housing for individuals struggling with chronic homelessness. The city and county made an offer to purchase the building. A week later, the Chamber of Commerce accepted a higher offer with fewer contingencies. This was a reasonable and prudent business decision by the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and fulfilled their fiduciary responsibility to the organization.

City and county government representatives have continued to search for an appropriate property from which to adequately serve those chronically homeless individuals who face the highest barriers to success. A bridge housing solution is just one part of a multi-tiered approach to addressing homelessness. Other approaches continue to involve housing vouchers, adding mental health and addiction treatment options, coordinating all service providers to comprehensively address all challenges, and simply spurring the development of housing in La Crosse as a market solution for a lack of available places to live in our community. In the short term, city staff will identify immediate safe shelter solutions for the spring when winter housing services are set to end at the Econo Lodge on Rose Street.

I believe we have an ongoing moral obligation to address the needs of those in our society who are the most vulnerable, including those who live without shelter. Regardless of any current or upcoming setbacks, as mayor of the City of La Crosse, I will not rest until we reach the goal of ending homelessness in our community.

Contact: Caley Rucker, Executive Secretary, Mayor's Office, ruckerc@cityoflacrosse.org

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