

## LOT C VISIONING EXERCISE

### Lot C Advisory Committee

Workshop Number 2, March, 6, 2014

La Crosse County Administrative Center

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

The following questions are intended to prompt you to think about Lot C in different ways than you have before and to start to describe your thoughts about positive outcomes through the redevelopment of this block. Please do not worry about writing perfect prose, or getting everything right in terms of sentence structure, or style. We are looking for your ideas and you should feel free to express them freely and openly.

We will be collecting these worksheets and summarizing the input we receive, but nothing will be attributed to any individual. Space has been provided for your responses. If you need additional space please write on the back or use additional sheets. Please try to write legibly. We want to be able to capture your ideas.

- 1. Thinking about Downtown La Crosse in general, not just as it relates to Lot C, what do you think are its greatest strengths? What are its biggest weaknesses?**

#### STRENGTHS:

- Flexible
- Historic
- Surrounded by beauty – river, park
- Personal and public investment in area
- Multi-use
- Great complementary businesses, parks (Riverside) pleasant streetscaping, historical feel, walking paths.
- Dynamic employees
- Robust
- Many different types of business (small, medium, and large)
- Improving in the housing availability
- Parks
- La Crosse Center and attractions
- Residency and worker population – people are the driving force behind any commercial endeavor.
- Unique setting – both geographic (Mississippi River/nature trails/parks) and manmade structures (e.g. historic district with sympathetic infill structures).
- Places to go / things to do – private and public opportunities for the population to enjoy our downtown.

- Variety – Restaurants – Shops – Pubs - Entertainment – River Front
- Mix of office/residential/retail/entertainment. Result is an area that has life beyond 8-5 Monday through Friday.
- Lots of good people interested in making it better.
- Proximity to Riverside Park/Rivers
- Natural beauty
- Relatively close to interstate
- Historic buildings
- Walk/bikeable
- Entertainment options – theaters, La Crosse Center, Taverns, restaurants
- Good local businesses
- Proximity to major employers (6-L, Mayo, LHI, etc.)
- Variety of business
- Communication between all stakeholders
- Vibrant
- Diverse
- Parking
- Beautiful architecture
- Well-kept buildings and property
- Streetscaping
- Mississippi River, Riverside Park, river walk and proximity to La Crosse river marsh
- Urban, dense development that preserves and celebrated history and historic buildings amount of residential
- Employment center for region, arts, culture, night life
- People live in our Downtown
- Our Theatre/arts district/La Crosse Center
- The other small retailers/business
- Vibrant
- Central business, government /arts and entertainment district
- Clean
- Historic district
- Strong and increasing residential base
- Good diversity of businesses
- Mississippi River/Riverside Park/La Crosse Center – excellent attractors
- Strong retail presence
- The present aesthetics of the historic downtown are strong.
- The river naturally brings people downtown
- Collaboration to work together to promote the historic character. Variety, festivals.
- Diverse
- Activity after 5

- Many people working and living downtown
- Vibrant, best places to relax eat, etc.
- Fabulous restaurants, unique eclectic shops that carry products of high quality. Great coffee shops.
- Close proximity to beautiful parks, Riverfront
- Strong tourism – facilities – emerging art district
- Greatest strength: The people – the spirit of entrepreneurship, positive retail environments.
- Remains busy after 5pm. Some downtowns become ghost towns at night.
- Art district
- Parks
- Mississippi River
- High traffic
- Proximity to large employment
- Retail/restaurant access
- Close to River/Riverside Park
- Easy access north without driving through the downtown area.
- Diversity, access to parks/the River, coffee shops, access to shopping, ease of walking about, LAX Center, restaurants, things that draw people to downtown, some of the Architecture.
- Diversity of businesses, organizations downtown – something for everyone.
- Large enough but not overwhelmingly huge
- Next to River: Riverside Park and Cameron park
- Something’s always happening – farmers market, community events
- Mix of old and new structures
- River, parks, walkable downtown, clean, bluffs
- Riverside Park, La Crosse Center - The diversity and vibrancy of the people.
  - The diversity and vibrancy of the businesses (Retail, services, professional, financial, government, entertainment, etc).
  - The historic character of most of Downtown, especially Pearl St.
  - The commitment of the entire community to our Downtown

**WEAKNESSES:**

- Not much activity after 5 pm, except at bars
- Limited access to groceries for residents
- Not much to attract or retain people of diverse backgrounds
- Some parks are blighted and need redevelopment
- Parking
- Less activity in parks (want more)
- More attractions
- A lot of “dead space” (i.e. lots, unused/vacant stores)

- Skyline could improve (is 10 fold better over past 35 years with additions of CenturyTel, Radisson, La Crosse Center, US Bank, etc.)
- Could use more employees
- Ongoing perception issues (negative) e.g. lack of parking; safety issues; “college aged, drunken night life”
- Expensive ownership – highest cost of ownership in City due to additional assessment/ code requirements.
- Parking
- Currently there is the Lot “C” project and just announced Hotel across from the Oktoberfest grounds and the North Riverside (Bob Johnson) Development project. We cannot move forward without a sense of direction of all 3 projects.
- Too little outdoor dining, green space or plaza areas to congregate
- Alcohol culture on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street can be detriment at times
- Downtown housing is somewhat spotty
- Difficult to get redevelopment of upstairs lofts, sq. footage in old buildings.
- Perception that parking is bad and/or it can be a challenge
- Lot C is ugly
- Point of entry into historical area from north is unsightly (Burger King, check–cashing, Title Loans, City Hall are aesthetically displeasing.)
- Parking
- Inconsistent parking messages
- Cleanliness (lack of)
- There are multiple buildings in need of major repair
- Open first level store fronts
- Unaggressive retailers
- Lack of stores open in the evening, Saturdays, Sundays
- Lack of parking management and coordination
- Bars / taverns
- Some parts of downtown are pretty rundown – e.g. the State Street from 7<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>
- Vacant retail stores
- Shortage of space in La Crosse Center and shortage of hotels to attract larger conventions/shows/musical arts
- Lack of medium /upper end housing
- Absence of certain types of retail stores – drug store, greeting card store
- Many establishments closed by day.
- Convenience. Lot C development could help extend downtown to La Crosse Street, as the area north of State Street often seems an island somewhat separate from the rest of downtown.
- Failure to bring more folks to the river or the folks from the river to downtown. Attracting the college students to downtown other than to drink.
- Too many empty stores and buildings

- Lack of tax base
- Need a professional sports team to play its game
- Empty store fronts, some shabby exterior facades that need attention and new paint jobs. Cleaner safer parking ramps. Need to add more green spaces, outdoor dining and small park lets.
- Undersized convention center
- Public dock system on river
- Next to a jail and juvenile detention center along with other institutional facilities.
- Less than vibrant/desirable real estate vibe in this part of town.
- High taxes? Maybe.
- Traffic is a mess in this area at least twice a day – Monday – Friday
- Number of bars and issues associated/created later in the night/evening. Increasing crime concerns, little.
- Could be more bike and pedestrian friendly.
- Some maintenance – some storefronts could be better kept up
- Loitering outside at night/intoxication people can be rude.
- Access to downtown from campus area – night – it's pretty dark, but I love seeing police cars at night and I see them frequently.
- Too many bars, not enough restaurants, not enough outdoor seating, more bike friendly streets, drinking scene;
- **Crime and the perception of crime**
  - The perception of a lack of convenient parking, especially on street parking (This will continue for the most part until metered parking with variable market rates using [demand responsive parking](#) is established for both on street and ramp parking)
  - Too many bars, especially dive bars for drunks, rather than taverns with food and entertainment
  - Some property owners that fail to maintain their properties
  - Some of the modern and modernized buildings that are out of context to the rest of Downtown
  - Old industrial buildings that need to be refurbished or replaced
  - Garbage, trash, graffiti, etc. especially in the alleys
  - Parking ramps that are too often less than pristine, especially after weekends (See dive bars)
  - Too many surface parking lots (ugly)
  - Not enough public spaces with street furniture, trees, grass, flowers, etc. in the right places
  - Not enough public attractions (museums, art galleries, recital halls, etc.)
  - The lack of way finding information for tourists and travelers
  - Services for residents, employees and visitors (day care, personal care, conveniences, etc.), especially within walking distance of Riverside Park.

**2. Thinking broadly, what would you like to see more of in Downtown La Crosse? What would you like to see less of? What changes would you see as improvements?**

**MORE OF:**

- Green space
- Sensitivity to diverse cultures of La Crosse
- Center for homeless or disadvantaged, at one location
- Great restaurants and specialty shops
- Someway to help individuals know what businesses are there and what is their “specialty”
- Taller buildings
- Museums/Arts
- Parking
- Restaurants
- Hotels
- Outdoor dining
- Improved roads
- Shops
- Housing
- Expansion of hiking/walking/biking pathways and extension of River walk
- Recruitment of specific, needs-based commercial entities
- Attractions
- Street restaurant seating
- Housing
- Hotel – middle to upscale
- More outdoor dining for restaurants. More public green space for concerts, activities.
- Upscale and decent housing
- Access for all types of transport (bike, pedestrian)
- I like open air restaurants/taverns (Europe).
- Fun retail shops
- Perhaps some national or regional retail and restaurant hubs to draw folk’s downtown.
- Parking – improvement – foot patrol – hand machines (habitual offenders). No parking white sticks
- Kid friendly activities
- Parks – areas, stores
- \*\*Bike lanes, bike parking , bike only streets to downtown
- More retail especially retail which would aggressively drive footsteps – residential properties
- Residential uses of all mixes, types, income levels, arts, culture, entertainment uses
- We have a tremendous downtown- more of that
- Housing – condo / rentals
- Continued growth of entertainment – art and venues

- Restaurants
- Entertainment options for 18 – 50 year-old segment
- Higher end housing – apartment or condos – for professionals and retired demographics
- Expansion of La Crosse Center
- 1-2 more hotels
- Expansion of river walk south and redevelopment of that area
- Collaboration (like this committee) with public and private sectors
- Coop. officer/businesses moving to downtown La Crosse
- Some bars is good, but more variety of shops, eateries could drive more day-time traffic.
- More galleries, boutiques, bike rentals, grownup entertainment vs. happy house from 9-close, coordinated maintenance of streetscaping and ramp cleaning
- More locations that attract those under 40 years old
- More opportunities for shopping (realizing might mean specialty shops)
- Opportunities for upscale residents
- More food stores and definitely a retail/drug store
- \*Unique boutique retail stores
- Children’s shop
- Office products
- Photography and Electronic Store
- Art galleries and Artist Incubator Center
- \*More upper Income residential housing, apartments and Condo’s – create a neighborhood:
  - More Pubs and Clubs
  - Improve the night life image
  - Clean and upgrade 3<sup>rd</sup> street and re-market this area to make it more positive.
- Locations that bring people to downtown. For example, a museum.
- Restaurants
- Retail
- Residential
- Events that draw people in from outlying areas.
- Streetscaping, flowers, trees, anything that beautifies the downtown, green space, restoration/preservation of older buildings, streets similar to Pearl Street, more diversity in type of business, downtown living opportunities.
- Better accessibility and also more bike/pedestrian friendly.
- Bike lock aprons
- Community events.
- Bicycle friendly streets, parking , etc...
- Laws of outdoor dining/seating relaxed
- Street fairs/festivals
- Restaurants
- Public attractions

- Specialty retail stores and restaurants
- Public art and music
- Taverns with food and entertainment
- Public spaces with street furniture, trees, grass, flowers, etc. in the right places
- Public attractions (museums, art galleries, recital halls, etc.)
- More way finding information for tourists and travelers
- **Services for residents, employees and visitors (day care, personal care, conveniences, etc.), especially within walking distance of Riverside Park.**

**LESS OF:**

- Bars and tattoo shops
- Transients wandering/looking for help
- Empty building's
- Bars, run down facilities
- Bars that don't serve food
- Traffic
- Pot holes
- Unused store fronts
- Underdeveloped lots
- Warehouses
- Lot parking
- Vagrants/homeless
- Vandalism
- Bars
- Low-rent
- Bars
- Trash
- Cigarette butts
- Snow
- Empty retail space
- Unimproved or aesthetically challenging building. (4<sup>th</sup> and Jay)
- Tattoo and smoke shops
- Troubled youth hangouts
- Improvement: Parking charge in certain locations via credit card pay stations
- Taverns
- Un-kept buildings and property
- Bars – car dealerships – vacant store fronts
- Taverns
- Tattoo stores
- Empty store fronts, garbage on weekends, empty planters

- Bars
- Empty buildings
- Less Bars and Taverns
- Empty buildings
- Institutional/correctional
- Crime
- Alcohol related residents/commerce
- Traffic congestion morning/evening
- Bars, litter
- Poorly maintained areas – whether grass or storefronts
- I feel that “downtown” is sometimes negatively portrayed as an area with “just a bunch of bars”. When the reality is that there is a lot of diversity. Maybe getting people to realize how much is downtown?
- Bars, cars
- **CRIME**
- Dive bars for drunks (Drink specials), which accounts for much of the crime and many of the other negatives
- Garbage, trash, graffiti, etc. especially in the alleys
- Modern and modernized buildings
- Old dilapidated industrial buildings
- Surface parking lots
- Concrete and asphalt
- *Reliance on having to drive to within Downtown get a bottle of orange juice or a snack!*

3. **For this question please accept the following assumptions:**

- a. It is the year 2024.
- b. Between today and then the economy has been reasonably stable and La Crosse has not experienced any major natural or man-made disasters, floods, tornados, fires, etc.
- c. The Lot C Advisory Committee did its work and provided solid direction to the City, County and the private developer.
- d. The City and County worked collaboratively throughout the planning and development process
- e. An experienced and well capitalized developer was selected and that developer delivered a phased project that was consistent with the communities' vision.

With all of these assumptions and your own hopes for the future describe Lot C twenty years from now. Please feel free to describe it in any way that is comfortable for you. You can describe what is there, who is there, what it looks like, or any other features or characteristics that match your aspirations. Describe the best outcomes you can imagine.

**Vision for Lot C**

- Tree bind struts, multiple ethnic restaurants, convenient access to Riverside Park, main traffic route diverted, small parks in center of various blocks, volunteers tending garden plots and beautification projects, affordable hotels, apartment. I support the idea of a museum or art center or cultural center.
- Mixed use development that is a flurry of activity catering to residential. Specialty shops lots of streetscaping and greenery. Something that looks old but is new, bicycle friendly.
- I envision a 10-12 store building filled with 2 floors below ground parking and 2-3 floors above ground parking. I see a major hotel and bank serving as the "anchors" of the mixed use building. The 2-3 floors below will be for hotel/bank customers. The hotel will also have a nice restaurant/bar with patio dining (maybe on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor where customers can enjoy a real outside i.e. rooftop dining and enjoy some of the skyline of La Crosse and also view the river). The hotel would be approximately 6-7 stories. The bottom level would also comprise retail shops and a possible museum. It would also be nice to see some of the space go to a small green area/park for people to enjoy. The remaining top floors may either be office space or condos.
- A multi-use (most likely, multi-owner) project that occupies the complete block. Consisting of sub-terrain parking, 1<sup>st</sup> floor (ground level) entrances to one or two commercial entities (e.g. hotel lobby; drive thru commercial entity with 2<sup>nd</sup> level sales floor/office).
- 2<sup>nd</sup> level above ground and above hotel/condos/high end apartments.
- Top floor – restaurant/lounge – green space on multi-level roofs. All in a historic looking structure (might look like a whole city block, rather than one Big building).
- Mixed use sight – housing – some retail – specialty restaurants – tourism attraction
- Embassy Suites

- If bank, one that enhances project and is successful.
  - Good full mid to high end housing full of people who shop downtown and work nearby (6-L, Mayo, County, LHi)
  - Hotel that shares parking with other retail
  - Building trait is beautiful, well made and enhances downtown.
- Parking
  - Bike racks, lanes \*has to be bike and pedestrian friendly
  - Office supply store
  - Like Dollar Store/Walgreens (convenience market)
  - Trader Joes (like)
  - In/outdoor seating area
  - Historical section
  - High enough for lookout? At top
  - High end efficiency living on Upper floors?
  - Child friendly areas
  - Indoor outdoor stores/seating
- Diverse use of retail, financial, restaurant, residential businesses which would attract people to our downtown area.
- 4 to 6 story buildings, publicly residential in use with ground floor retail, restaurants, bars include outdoor seating and plazas, roof top gardens and terraces.
- High quality building materials – brick, masonry, stone
- Parking for residential units can be incorporated into buildings.
- Include a mix of income including market rate, affordable units.
- A very beautifully designed mix use
- Space that includes theatre or museum, music venue
  - Apartments' – upscale to more modest
  - Hotel
  - Shops
  - Restaurants (maybe some kind of a theme music – (little Nashville)
  - Beautifully landscaped
  - Space for outside seating
- This space is fully used, buzzing with vitality / interest. A waiting list exists to live in the apartments and the Hotel is always booked.
- A mixed use facility that incorporates retail, fitness, entertainment and housing (condos, hotel or apartments) in a building that also includes underground parking and following historic design standards.
- Underground Parking
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Floor – retail / bank
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor – (via Ereslaaon?) food court (like the food court at Mall of America – various fast foods and traditional restaurants)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor – fitness/movie theatre

- 4<sup>th</sup> Floor – Hotel/upscale condos
- 10 Floor
- Courtyard/green space
- Rooftop seating/garden and restaurant?
- Lot C is near the County and City buildings. It is also within walking distance from the river and downtown shops.

I believe a multi-purpose building with a business or two where folks visiting the Courthouse, City Hall or County buildings could stop-in quickly to tend to business and maybe get some food or a coffee.

One or two traditional businesses with another dining place or coffee shop or two would be a convenient stop for the many people who may be tending to other business in the area.

Additional public open space with good aesthetics value would be a draw as were for those tending to downtown business, or walking downtown.

Essentially, a well-constructed, multi-use and convenient development.

Many people may be downtown already. What could bring those people in and draw others downtown is the big question for just what businesses should be there. Thought should also be given to variety and not taking away from existing businesses downtown.

- Restaurants with outdoor seating, interactive museum, housing above a hotel, and bike and sports rentals – maybe to be used and dropped off in another part of the city. Upper floor green space – restaurant seating, as well as a courtyard.
- Mixed use, majority of private business, some open space, some opportunity for living (rent or buy) in Lot C. Probably would include hotel. Increase tax base, some parking.
- Building with strong historic character that compliments the Historic District. Underground parking – street level bank, corner grocery – possible retail \*(not in favor of a lot – we have space to fill downtown ). Attractive streetscaping – some green space.

Hotel or condominium housing or both on upper levels. Rooftop terrace – restaurant with outdoor dining on 2<sup>nd</sup> level terrace. Housing that creates a new neighborhood and community of people that want to live in a downtown environment. Live. Work. Eat. Shop. Play!

- I would like to see Lot C lay the foundation for a thriving downtown. This should be the key anchor for further development in the community. I really see a museum with unique architecture (for example, the Milwaukee Art Museum with its “wings”). I would also like to see some research associated with the local universities that that is focused on the river. A collaboration with the USGS makes a lot of sense.

This should be a legacy project that will bring people to La Crosse and be around for 100 years. A philanthropic solution should not be discounted.

- New Gateway Property to downtown from the north replacing the LEC  
Mixed use, high end (for LSE) residential/retail with parking under the development.  
Set the standard for other similar developments.  
Sparked further redevelopment of single family homes in La Crosse, spreading out from downtown.  
City's tax base is up 35% in current dollars.  
City has attracted employers and retained those already here.
- A lot that has some green space, architecturally significant buildings that compliment downtown and are appealing, a lot populated with mixed space buildings/business. Perhaps a well done hotel with other businesses. Trees and flowers, perhaps something with a courtyard feel to it. Something that will be attractive, well-done and that will cause people to want to come downtown.
- Eco friendly; bike and pedestrian friendly (Solar panels? Wind energy? Something fun!)
- Underground parking
- Used by many people
- Accessible
- Not just one thing
- Trees
- Real food coop. Downtown residents. Driftless residents. Travelers. Visitors. Food is the future and we should embrace and be proud of the Driftless region and what it has to offer.
- The old Courthouse block (Lot C) bounded by State St, Vine St, 3rd and 4th Sts is perhaps the most valuable single parcel in the county. The land value alone is probably somewhere north of \$1,000,000 and as a single block in the heart of downtown, it has tremendous potential for high value development.

The idea of a large private development has been around for some time with thoughts of development similar to Market Square and Grand River Station. An 8-10 story building with retail and offices on the first floor, a parking ramp in the interior or on the middle floors, offices and apartments above with perhaps a restaurant overlooking the entire city on the top floor would be ideal.

Retail and offices should be a mix of market rates as well as for special rates for incubation of new businesses and non-profits. Apartments should also be a mix of market rate units and rates for low and moderate income residents.

All of the features should incorporate the best design features for people with disabilities.

A building with a tiered design so more floors can overlook the Mississippi River and with small exterior courtyards with trees, grass, flowers as well as public art and music for people to gather would make it an exceptional place. Interior courtyards overlooking the River for the winter months should also be included.

The La Crosse County Historical Society should be involved in this process with the idea of including the historical museum as one of the first floor tenants. The Society can also display artifacts in the courtyards and other public spaces.

A space for a day care facility with a small playground should also be included to meet the needs of working parents as well as visitors to this side of Downtown.

The County should possibly consider locating all existing administrative offices, except those directly connected to the courts, law enforcement or social services in this building. A small auditorium for County Board and other meetings should also be considered. And a skywalk or underground access to the County Courthouse should also be a feature, especially if there are any County offices in the new building.

The overall design should be compatible with historic Downtown and meet the needs of potential anchor tenants, including the County, while remaining as flexible as possible for future needs that may not be anticipated.

The building should incorporate as many energy saving features as possible (passive, geothermal, solar, etc.). Any and all rainwater and melting snow should be captured and reused for green spaces, fountains, cooling, etc.

It should also have an alley to interior or below ground service entrances for deliveries and service contractors.

As I recall, the reluctance of some County Supervisors to sell the land for development has to do with the loss of parking and control of the land for potential future needs. This is a legitimate concern, but it is also based on maintaining the status quo of the majority of county employees commuting in their single occupant vehicles (SOVs) to park them most or all of the day at heavily subsidized rates.

It also accepts the belief that free or below market off street parking needs to be provided to visitors, rather than maximizing the delivery of government services via other means (Internet, phone, mail, etc.) and charging flexible market rate fees via metered parking.

Perhaps the solution is not to sell the land, but to lease it to a private developer. The lease would include the County receiving a portion of the building for office space and parking with the remainder available for lease for mixed uses and tenants. The county would continue to maintain some control via the terms of the lease, while the tax base is increased and Downtown, the City and the County would have a development that helps create jobs and grow our local economy.

No matter what, the County, like all other major employers and institutions must start charging market rates for employee and visitor parking. We can no longer continue to have landowners and property taxpayers subsidize the heavy dependence on the over 90% of commuters that choose SOVs as their primary transit choice, as it is unsustainable economically, socially and environmentally.