



MEMO

**TO: Eau Claire City Council
Eau Claire City Plan Commission
Eau Claire City Manager
Interested & Effected Citizens**

RE: Leadership Responsibility for Full Disclosure & Our Future Heritage

As community civic leaders, there is a need to openly discuss a number of issues and concerns that have not been fully disclosed with regard to the path that Eau Claire County is intent upon taking within the city of Eau Claire. The issue at hand is not simply about an innocuous tastefully designed two-story county jail near the river, it is about disclosure and discussion of the long-term permanent plans that will significantly impact our county and city for several generations—physically, socially, historically, and financially.

Due to the unprecedented economic and judicial significance of this project, it is imperative that we discuss the full impact of the long-term direction being considered by the County, which includes:

- a **five-story** Regional Jail Complex capable of housing more than **750** regional inmates;
- a new 41.1 million dollar county courts facility that, when completed, will eliminate all homes in the first block on the north side of Lake Street
- a two to three level parking ramp on Oxford Avenue

Quite simply, this project should not be initiated in this location. There are several viable alternatives that are less harmful to the neighborhood and the city of Eau Claire, as well as far less costly to the residents and taxpayers of both the City and County of Eau Claire.

It is of the utmost importance that **full disclosure** of the county's future plans are discussed at this critical junction of Eau Claire's future. Before the County and City move forward with **the largest and most expensive endeavor ever undertaken in the history of Eau Claire County**, we must assure ourselves and the citizens of Eau Claire that these plans are in the best interests of **all** concerned parties — the County, the City, the taxpayers, the neighborhood, and the inmates. Because of the immensity of this project, right now, we stand at a crossroads that will determine the financial solvency and future economic viability of our city. We will set the tone for the future heritage we will leave behind and city of Eau Claire will need to live with.

Full disclosure must be an integral part of our discussions. Clearly, once these plans are wholly revealed and their full impact of is understood, the county will be advised to seek out other viable alternatives that are less harmful to downtown Eau Claire, all of the county's residents, and our fair city's heritage.

The **Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan** was adopted by the City Council on September 27, 2005. According to the City of Eau Claire this plan was designed to serve as a guide for the City's decisions about the long-term growth and the physical development of the Eau Claire community through 2025. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan was also created to identify "*...a coherent and fiscally responsible development pattern for the Eau Claire community and...to encourage consistent public and private decisions about future development.*"

Based on the goals of Comprehensive Plan, this Regional Jail Review document will identify and explain the inconsistencies and contradictions of the proposed county jail expansion with the City Comprehensive Plan. For clarity, every item related to the *Courthouse District* found in the Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan has been

copied in the Appendix B for your review. As you read through these statements taken directly from the Comprehensive Plan, it will be very clear that the current Regional Jail Complex as planned by Eau Claire County is not a part of the city's plans for the location chosen by county, nor is it in the best interest of the City of Eau Claire to rezone this land for the purposes of incarceration.

This report will highlight information being gathered in a series of documents to be referred to as the "*Eau Claire Regional Jail Review*." The Review is intended to be shared with city and county leaders, the public, and all concerned parties to help facilitate better understanding of the proposal jail expansion and to indicate that the majority of Eau Claire's citizens support the current City Comprehensive Plan and outwardly reject the County's current project proposal.

The Review will also look at the Regional Jail project in light of other studies and findings from the National Institute of Corrections concerning Jail Design Criteria, as well as specific analysis of our own Criminal Justice System. We will attempt to highlight and make comment on some factors that may have influenced the decision to follow this course if they had been known sooner in the process.

This Review will also try to deal with some of the viable alternatives available to Eau Claire County with regard to future Jail alternative plans. As we are by no means experts on the subject, we intend only to point out some areas that because of directional blinders may have overlooked through the process in the past.

Finally, we hope that this review will provide some groundwork for needed discussions. The large majority of constituents in this community are highly agitated by the current business as usual and "it's a done deal" approach to such a community changing project. If we are going to alter the stated goal of our comprehensive plan for the future of downtown Eau Claire and surrounding neighborhoods, we need to do so in an open forum and provide more than 5 minute comments the day before the decision is to be made. If we intend to re-define the heritage of our downtown and leave open the door to it becoming a Regional Jail location, then we need to do so in full disclosure of this choice.

Last minute realizations that we can reduce our Jail population growth rate by applying new programs and analyzing the way we do criminal justice will not ensure that we will reduce our growth rate. We will not be able to put the cart behind the horse and state that we will never fully build out the new jail, rent-out jail beds, nor that we will never become a regional jail facility... These promises to keep county growth manageable and considerate to the neighborhood have less validity than the belief that > "*if we build it we will fill it build some more and fill it again*".

If you would like to meet with any of us to discuss this issue and to obtain a better understanding of the positions presented here—which represent a majority view of Eau Claire County residents—contact us at any time. The coffee will be our treat.

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