



Livable Neighborhoods, Inc.

www.livable-neighborhoods.org

PO Box 831

La Crosse, WI 543602-0831

To improve and promote the livability
of all neighborhoods in the La Crosse area

2017 La Crosse Mayor/Council Candidate Survey

Livable Neighborhoods is a non-profit citizen's advocacy group established in 1996. Our purpose is to improve and promote the livability of all neighborhoods in the La Crosse area. We encourage citizens to research and discuss important issues in our community, including the positions on those issues by candidates for elected offices.

The following questions have been developed by our Board of Directors to help La Crosse residents learn more about the candidates for Mayor and Common Council prior to the Spring Election on Tuesday, April 4, 2017. We are inviting each candidate to complete our survey.

The responses of all candidates will be made available to the public and media at www.livable-neighborhoods.org. The answers will be posted as submitted without summary, editing or comment.

Please complete the survey by providing your **best** answers to the **highlighted statements and questions**. Your answers can be as short or as long as you choose and include references or links.

You can access a blank survey at www.livable-neighborhoods.org/2017Survey.doc. Save the file with your name in the file name, and then type your answer to each question in the row below each question (As you type, the row will expand automatically as needed). Or if you prefer, you hand write your answers (please number) on a separate piece(s) of paper.

Please return your completed survey to info@livable-neighborhoods.org. Or mail to Livable Neighborhoods, Inc., PO Box 831, La Crosse, WI 543602-0831

Questions? Please contact *Charles Clemence* at 738-1736 or vp@livable-neighborhoods.org.

Thank you for your willingness to serve.

Candidate for: Mayor _____ Common Council (District x)

Name:	Nick Dutton
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1. The proposed 5B-1 N-S Corridor between I-90 by US Hwy 53 and US Hwys 14/61 (South Ave) @ 7th St S remains in the La Crosse Area Planning Commission (LAPC) and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) long-range transportation plan for the La Crosse area. The original 5B-1 proposal also remains enumerated in the Wisconsin Statutes and on the approved list of Major Highway Projects of the Transportation Projects Commission (TPC). WisDOT currently has 6 build options for a new N-S road that are hybrids of the original 5B-1 proposal through the marsh and the neighborhoods. This is all despite the 1998 referendum turning down the original 5B-1 proposal by 11,951 to 7,076, as well as the City of La Crosse Comprehensive Plan, several neighborhood plans and the City Transportation Vision that do not include any calls for any new N-S road through the marsh or the neighborhoods.

Do you believe there is a need for any new N-S road through the marsh and the neighborhoods in the City of La Crosse? Please explain.

No. I will never support a road through the marsh. Environmentally, the marsh is a habitat for endangered species. Economically, a road makes it easier for working families to leave town, decreasing our tax base and increasing the wear and tear on our roads. Also, from a logistics standpoint, the road would diminish the marsh's ability to hold potential flood waters, a problem we don't need.

2. The LAPC and WisDOT also have other proposals to for existing highways, including:

- extend 12th Avenue S in Onalaska to State Hwy 16 just north of County Hwy B
- expand State Hwy 16 from 4 lanes to 6 lanes from County Hwy OS to La Crosse St
- expand La Crosse St from 2 lanes to 4 lanes from Losey Blvd to 7th St
- (original proposal) expand South Ave between Green Bay St and Ward Ave from 4 lanes to 5 lanes (Two way left turn lane in the middle) with restricted access on side streets, which would remove a few businesses and most of the houses on one side of an entire block (proposal has since been scaled back).

Do you believe there is any need for any additional roads or expansion of existing roads? Please explain.

I do not believe we should displace residents for roads to accommodate cars from other cities as a first option. Instead, we should concern ourselves with promoting an MTU and Park and Ride system that promotes carpooling and decreasing congestion. If we don't, we will continue to increase congestion indefinitely, which I don't think will a sustainable option for our environment or infrastructure. Road widening projects need to be closely examined.

3. Transportation Demand Management (TDM) is a series of policies and standards that require employers and institutions provide alternatives to their employees, customers and students that currently rely heavily on single occupant vehicles (SOVs) as their primary mode of transportation. TDM policies and standards are established by municipalities and include such things as flexible scheduling, telecommuting, ride sharing, express commuter buses, incentives to live closer to their destinations, walk or bike, ride mass transit, van pools, or private buses, provide concierge services for employees, etc., combined with market rate commuter parking (no more "free" parking), on street paid parking via kiosks not meters in commercial districts to discourage use by commuters and encourage turnover for nearby merchants, with revenues used to improve the district, and commuter impacted neighborhood parking districts to discourage the use of residential streets by commuters.

Do you believe the City of La Crosse should prioritize implementing TDM policies and standards to prevent La Crosse from further becoming a drive through community? Please explain.

I believe we do need to increase our use of these policies. The coming increase in cost for non-La Crosse residents to lease parking space in our downtown ramps is a great start. These policies reduce our pollutions, reduce damage to roads, and reduce congestion. These are all much better goals than displacing city residents. We also need to address the fact that people feel they have a right to free parking. There is much to research about other cities our size.

4. The City of La Crosse faces continuing budgetary challenges stemming from increased costs as well as stable

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or decreasing revenues. The results have been significant reductions in personnel as well as deferred maintenance and improvements to our existing infrastructure. In short, we're paying more and getting less.

How can we best utilize the available resources, while maintaining the level of services and investments in our infrastructure that are essential for a city to thrive and survive? Please explain.

The aforementioned change in pricing on the parking ramps is a great start. Ideally, the city can work with the many great community organizations we have to raise funds, awareness, and work towards better public transportation and a Park and Ride system.

5. The City of La Crosse, along with several local organizations and business, have made important strides in stabilizing and even improving our neighborhoods. Many of our older neighborhoods and even some that are not so old, especially those in the flood plan and along our highways continue to experience challenges. More owner occupied single family homes are being converted to rentals and property maintenance continues to be a challenge. Neighborhood businesses that add the quality of life are coming back in some places, but not others.

How do we continue and even improve these efforts while avoiding gentrification? Please explain.

I do not believe that gentrification is a major problem at this point in time. Efforts to replace or renovate dilapidated buildings are important to the local economy. CouleeCap, Habitat for Humanity, and the La Crosse Promise all have goals to help improve housing and I believe they all have good programs that we can work with.

6. La Crosse has seen an increase in the people that choose to walk or bike more often over recent years, however this also increases the potential for conflicts and crashes with motor vehicles, with the people that walk or bike more likely to be severely injured or even killed.

How can we improve traffic safety in general, but especially for people that walk or bike? Please explain.

We need a concentrated effort to re-educate people in cars. The hurry people have is very obviously not worth the potential damage that reckless driving can have on others. One example that should help the area it's located in is the roundabout on 7th Street. They are statistically much safer options to pedestrians and cars alike, and most pedestrians are injured at intersections. We can also ask that law enforcement make more of an effort to penalize drivers who endanger pedestrians and bikers.

7. La Crosse, like other communities in the Upper Midwest, has experienced an increase in the problems due to methamphetamine and heroin, in addition to our chronic challenges with binge drinking and acute alcoholism.

How can the City of La Crosse, together with La Crosse County and other institutions, best address these scourges and the negative impacts on the individuals as well as our community? Please explain.

Our prison system has a 75% recidivism rate, which means that 75% of offenders end up back in prison for the same crime or worse. Given these statistics, it is clear that prison alone is not working.

Education and cooperation with the Drug Court system are key. This program allows users the ability to try to get clean while becoming successful members of society. That said, we need more treatment options and we need to pursue programs with the local hospitals to offer better treatment.

8. Most revenues for municipal services come from property taxpayers, with 53.5% coming from residential property owners ([UWEX 2010 Report](#)). Industrial and commercial properties are assessed at different rates than residential properties, with depreciation and other exemptions available to business and rental property owners. About 50% of the property in the City of La Crosse is tax exempt, although a few of the larger institutions pay for some municipal services. And about 50% of the residential properties are rentals, with typically with many more adults per dwelling unit than in owner occupied single family homes. These factors result in a disproportionate share of the costs for providing municipal services being borne by the smaller and smaller

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number of adults in the owner occupied single family homes. State statutes provide for municipalities to establish various utilities, user fees and special districts whereby property owners would pay based on the municipal services provided, rather than the assessed value and property type.

Would you support establishing the following? Please explain.

- **Conditional use permits for parking lots for 5 or more vehicles, with an annual permit fee based upon the number of parking spaces, with the funds used for street maintenance, traffic patrols and emergency services?**

This greatly depends on the goal and location. If these were near the outskirts of town and used for park and ride services and/or MTU pick up locations I believe they would benefit the entire city.

- **A street amenities utility to cover the costs of providing street lights, sidewalks, and streetscaping (trees, planters, bike racks, waste receptacles, carriage walks, etc.)?**

I do believe that these infrastructure improvements are important. Our current Capital Improvement program can help provide for some of these, but I don't think that the rotating schedule of providing funds to neighborhood associations efficiently tackles many of these problems. I would like to see a shift in this program to provide smaller amounts of funding on a more consistent basis. This would help to prioritize the needs of the whole city.

- **A multi-municipality fire protection district to provide fire protection funded by fees based on property use (agricultural, industrial, commercial, residential, vehicular, recreational, haz mat, etc.), with fire stations located where needed vs. based on municipal boundaries, and staffed with full-time paid and/or on-call paid fire fighters based upon the potential need?**

I would not be opposed to this as long as the fees were charged in a fair and proportional way. This includes examining the opportunity cost of having the fire stations moving into a different municipality and potentially displacing housing or business. I believe that our fire departments should be flexible in working with all fire services.

- **Conditional use permits for retailers of alcohol with annual fees based upon the types and methods of alcohol sales (i.e. 24 oz and 40 oz malt beverages, personal sized bottles of hard alcohol, \$1 shots, all you care to drink specials, etc.) with the funds used for increased police patrols and clean up ?**

I would like to look at other communities our size and see what they've done to successfully reduce binge drinking. If we only try to blame the businesses we will miss the root of the problem, which is that people pursue heavy drinking.

9. The City of La Crosse has a strong council – weak mayor system of government with a full-time salaried mayor. The mayor can and does work with department heads, but has no power to hire, fire or discipline any of them – this power rests, with limited exceptions, with the Common Council, which requires a majority to take any action. In 2012, the voters defeated a proposal to hire a city administrator via a referendum in large part because of the politics of that time. The current mayor will have served 4 years and is unopposed in the upcoming election for another 4-year term. Many other cities, including neighboring Onalaska, have changed to a part-time mayor and a professional city manager to improve accountability of the day to day operations of the municipality.

Is this something that should be discussed for possible implementation in 2021? Please explain.

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This definitely needs to be discussed. Efficient use of city money and resources is absolutely important. Tax money is being collected and needs to be used to ensure day-to-day operations run smoothly. I believe that we need to find the best city management system to provide results to our citizens.

10. The City of La Crosse has more boards and commissions than most of our peer cities in Wisconsin, with a number established to rule on various appeals. Some of these boards and commissions meet far more often (i.e. Board of Public Works meets weekly vs. monthly or bi-weekly) than our peer cities. A few boards and commissions also have some difficulties obtaining a quorum to conduct business. Citizen participation and input are important, but so is limiting the number of meetings that people must attend to obtain approvals, permits or licenses. Many of our peer cities rely on their professional staff to handle approvals, permits and licenses administratively based on the ordinances and resolutions approved by elected officials, with a single body of elected officials to hear most of the appeals.

Should the City of La Crosse reduce the number of boards and commissions, and streamline the process for approvals, permits and licenses so staff can deal with administratively? Please explain.

I believe that our government should always find ways to operate more efficiently while providing the best possible service to the community. To the end, it is necessary to make sure that we have boards and commissions that function. Any boards or commissions that have trouble obtaining a quorum should be absorbed by other boards or commissions so they will be able to accomplish goals.

11. In 2012, the Joint City-County Housing Task Force [Report](#) identified several recommendations the City of La Crosse could act upon to improve neighborhood revitalization efforts, with the #1 Recommendation “Better education and enforcement of existing codes and standards”.

Do you agree this should be #1? Do you believe code education and enforcement have been a priority by the various City of La Crosse departments? The Municipal Court? Please explain.

Education and enforcement are incredibly important. Many people do not know codes and therefore do not uphold them on their end.

12. One of the biggest obstacles to neighborhood revitalization are chronic nuisance properties. A single nuisance property can have a negative impact on an entire block or area. Examples of chronic nuisance properties are homes, apartments or businesses used as drug houses, scrap yards or party houses, empty and dilapidated properties with pests and vermin, owners or tenants that are chronic alcoholics or drug users, etc. There are also properties with constant problems such as assaults and fights, drunk and disorderly, thefts, vandalism, sources of drunken drivers, “falls” and “accidents”, etc. One example, in June 2014 for the first time, the City of La Crosse shut down 214-216 24th St S after years of complaints and arrests involving drugs and other crimes. Since then, other properties have been identified as potential nuisance properties and most of the property owners have been cooperative, however there are others that remain. Orders to correct for code violations are issued, but citations with fines are rare. The police issue citations and even make arrests when warranted, but too often the drug dealer is back at it a few days later or the drunken behaviors continue the next weekend, etc. The eventual result for some of these properties is they eventually end up so dilapidated they are condemned and razed, often at significant taxpayer expense.

Do you believe identifying and addressing nuisance properties has been a priority by the various departments? The coordination between city departments as well as with county and state officials has been sufficient? That the Municipal Court and Circuit Courts have been supportive when all other means of addressing these chronic nuisance properties have failed to achieve positive results? Please explain.

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Enforcement of laws is important, and I do believe that our police and our Courts are doing everything within their power to prevent these issues, but we also need to ensure that we look to the causes of these symptoms. Poverty is a root cause of many of these issues, but so is code enforcement. The council needs to work to increase the quality of our housing and also boost the economy to ensure that people can find gainful employment.

13. Currently the City of La Crosse Parking Utility provides “free” on street parking (paid for by a special parking assessment on downtown property owners), “free” ramp parking for up to 3 hours, \$1 an hour ramp parking for more than 3 hours with a maximum of \$6.00 per day, with leased ramp parking for \$25 + tax per space per month for 12-hours M-F 6AM to 6PM, or \$35 + tax per space per month for 24-hours. These rates do not cover the capital costs for the ramps, much less the additional costs for maintenance, utilities and security, or the loss of potential tax base for development. In Rochester, MN on street or ramp parking is \$0.40 to \$1.40 per hour, and leased ramp parking from \$90 to \$170 per month, with the rates depending on the location and duration

Do you believe it is time for the City of La Crosse to replace the special parking assessment on downtown property owners with a market rate parking system that will encourage on street turnover of spaces and discourage on street commuter parking to help build traffic for merchants, provide funds for improved cleaning, maintenance and security of the streets, sidewalks and ramps, as well as pay the full capital costs for building the parking ramps? Please explain.

Yes, we need to research ways to decrease congestion downtown, and charging more for parking has to be part of that discussion. We need commuters to pay for the damage they do to La Crosse roads, and this is one way to accomplish that goal. We can stand to look more at the model the University has as well as the way this is handled in other cities and develop a program that fits La Crosse.

14. State laws provide for the establishment of Neighborhood Improvement Districts (NIDs), which are similar to a Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) district for commercial or industrial areas. The property owners in a potential NID petition to create the NID and if approved by the municipality, a NID Board made up of property owners in the NID is established. The NID Board can then levy a special assessment on the properties in the NID to be used for capital improvements in the NID.

Do you support the general concept of Neighborhood Improvement Districts (NIDs)? Please explain.

This idea sounds good, but we need to see how this has functioned in other cities. Taxing a specific area more directly will only be effective if the NID Board can work closely with the city.

15. Finally, what experience, ideas, qualities, etc. do you have that will help you make the City of La Crosse the best city it can be for all our residents?

I graduated UW – La Crosse in 2009 with two Bachelor's Degrees, one in Political Science and one in Economics. I also had a minor in Sociology. During the course of my studies, I worked hard on many research projects which saw me analyzing statistical data that I collected from fellow students. I prefer to gather as much information as I can from others before I make my decisions.

I am currently working as an independent insurance agent, and my role in that job is to represent my clients to the 24+ different carriers that my company works with in WI. I already understand the meaning of customer service as well as the need to fight for the small interests vs the big interests.

I am currently the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee for Weigent-Hogan neighborhood association and I plan to continue working in that role so that I understand the needs of those in my city.

I am a member of the Chamber of Commerce and have been asked to join their Outreach Committee to help

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improve the relationships that our businesses have to our city. I also participate in their Young Professionals of the Coulee Region events and have been involved in their Young Professionals Housing Task Force, which has the goal of improving housing to draw in more Young Professionals, whether that be newly graduated students or families.

One of my biggest goals in running for City Council is to bring our city together and increase participation in city events. There has been a growing sense of community in La Crosse, but I believe that being a more visible member of the Council will help people to understand how their local government works and how it is involved with their lives. As a member of the Council I would maintain my existing website and look to implement a monthly newsletter about what is happening at City Hall.