



“Root Cause” Of Urban Decline and Poverty in La Crosse

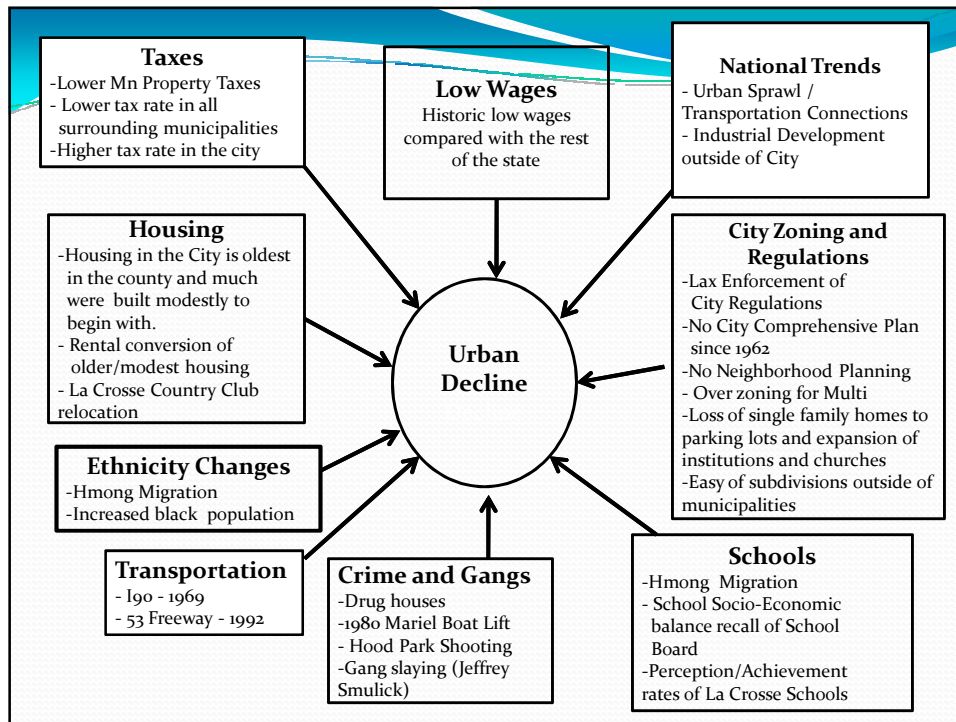
Joint City/County Housing Task Force
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Urban Decline and Poverty in La Crosse

There is no single “ROOT CAUSE”

There are many factors and they are interrelated



Factors leading to urban decline

- Loss of single family homes to parking lots and expansion of institutions and churches
- Lax subdivision control in outlying counties
- School Socio-Economic Balance – Recall of School Board
- Perception/Achievement rates of La Crosse Schools (Act Scores)
 - Onalaska – 23.8
 - Logan – 22.4
 - Central – 21.8
 - Holmen – 21.2
- Historic low wages compared with the rest of the state
- Housing in the city is oldest in the county and much was built modestly to begin with.
- Rental conversion of older/modest housing
- National Trends of sprawl evidenced locally
- Lower Mn Property Taxes
- Lower tax rate in all surrounding municipalities
- Higher tax rate in the City
- Crime – Hood Park Shooting, Gang Initiation Murder (Jeffrey Smulick)
- Drug Houses
- 1980 Mariel Boat Lift – 125,000 Cubans arrive in Florida (Crime rose dramatically in the La Crosse area after refugees were sponsored to area families. Kay Mann, a Spanish-speaking lawyer, handled 350 to 400 court cases involving about 200 different Cuban defendants.)

Factors leading to urban decline

- Labor Market catchment area for La Crosse is in three states and necessitates commuters to more rural areas
- Hmong Migration/Some white flight
- Transportation “Improvements” such as the completion of Interstate 90 and especially the construction of the 53 Freeway led to population growth in Onalaska, Holmen and West Salem
- No Comprehensive Plan since 1962
- No neighborhood scale planning
- Concentration on Industrial Development and Downtown Revitalization at the expense of neighborhood initiatives
- La Crosse Country Club Referendum causes mass exodus of wealthy to low tax havens in Shelby, Medary and Onalaska
- Lax City zoning regulations – definition of family, coupled with enrollment increases at UWL
- Overzoning of Multifamily- no SF zoning district until mid 1980s
- Lax Enforcement of regulations
- No rental inspection
- Concentration of services and probation and parolees in several neighborhoods

Push – Pull Factors

Push

- High Taxes
- Actual/Perceived Higher Crime Rates
- Drug Houses/Gang activity
- Perceived Lower Achieving Schools/older less “curb appeal” to City Schools
- Older housing stock

Pull

- Brand New Schools
- New Housing Stock
- Safer Neighborhoods
- Bigger lots/country “feel”
- Ease of land conversion
- Relative Short Commute Times
- Markedly lower property taxes

Many factors over last 60 years still at play

- Sprawl continues
- Student housing is omnipresent in virtually all parts of the city
- Insertion of students into SF neighborhoods was on the decline, now is happening again
- Oldest housing is getting even older, more dilapidated
- Still have low wage environment
- Crime and drug houses still an issue
- Homes to parking lot conversion still occurring
- Lax enforcement in city, no rental inspection at present
- **New trends present opportunity to steer households to La Crosse**

Some Research???

- What is the Census data on Home ownership versus rental for 1930- to 2010????
- What has been the poverty rate for the City over the same time period? (La Crosse County overall poverty rate is 14.6 Percent, 11th highest in the state. The rate was 10.7 percent in 2000.