



September 18, 2023

Hon. Mayor Cory Mason and Common Council  
Racine City Hall  
730 Washington Ave.  
Racine WI 53403

Dear Mayor Mason and Council Members:

For nearly 60 years, the Racine Literacy Council has served people of this community, many of them the most under-resourced, under-represented and vulnerable people among us. So, dealing with the issues perplexing our downtown is extremely delicate and difficult for me and the organization I represent.

But as the direct neighbor of the YMCA, which is across from our building at 734 Lake Ave., I am here to address the growing concerns we have about this blighted property. I do so knowing full well how trying it must be for the YMCA, another nonprofit, to handle this situation, but also knowing the trouble this empty building has caused for the neighborhood, our employees, our volunteers and our students.

First, I most heartedly advocate that the city acquire and raze this nuisance.

I became the executive director of the Racine Literacy Council in mid-August last year. I was astounded by the change downtown since I last worked here. While there has always been a homeless population downtown, I had not in the past witnessed some of the aggression and pervasive loitering, drunkenness, disregard for personal property and safety as I have in the last year.

Within days of returning to work downtown, I was dealing with staff members afraid of who they would find lingering in our parking lot in the morning. Within weeks, my staff noticed someone had broken windows on the second floor of the YMCA and reported it. Every day, we can hear shouting. I have chased away people drinking in our parking lot. My staff and I stopped a person from blatantly moving in behind a wall on our property. Within a month, I was imploring our Board of Directors to invest in a security lock for the front door and security cameras, which we have indeed invested in for roughly \$7,500.

I'm so glad we took that step for the safety of our staff, volunteers and students.

We have a terrible problem, and it is not an easy one to address. Aside from the empty building that attracts squatters, we have noticed a growing number of two groups of people. One we are trying to serve and another that hampers peace and safety downtown.

There is a large population of adults with disabilities. The adults we have encountered come to us with a fervent desire to learn to read, write and comprehend better so that they have fulfilling lives. Some of them hope to secure jobs and others just want a better quality of life. For this reason, we are starting a new program in October in partnership with Lakeside Curative Services to help support this population, which in many cases has been left to languish without hope.

Then, there is another growing population. They seem to prey on the people with disabilities who live downtown. We have noticed them at Memorial Hall, luring in deals, and around the neighborhood. They prey on the vulnerable. They should have no place here.

Racine is a wonderful community. The Racine Literacy Council stands ready to lift up those who need and want assistance. But we desperately need the city to rid the downtown of those who prey on people, who make our businesses unsafe and who disrespect private property and the law.

For these reasons, we fully support the city's acquisition of the YMCA and razing the building. It has cost us dearly to have this blight as our neighbor.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Laura Sumner Coon".

Laura Sumner Coon  
Executive Director