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To: Members of the Building Commission and Joint Committee on Finance

The 7 Rivers Alliance -- a regional economic development organization in western Wisconsin -- urges your support for the Prairie Springs Science Center/Cowley Hall Demolition at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

The continued success of UW-La Crosse is a key part of our regional economy. It is one of only two four-year campuses in Wisconsin to have enrollment growth in the last decade.

Graduates from UW-La Crosse fill desperately needed jobs -- not only in our region but across the state. One of those job sectors is science, technology, engineering and mathematics -- or STEM. We need graduates who approach problems from all contexts, using quantitative, collaborative, innovative, and logical analysis rooted in STEM.

Prairie Springs fits those needs. It will provide the ideal blend of learning, technology and collaboration with local research partners like Gundersen Health System and Mayo Clinic Health System. It will provide research and lab space for the UW System's new Freshwater University Program, with the Mississippi River located only blocks away.

Prairie Springs would replace the 56-year-old Cowley Hall, which is structurally incapable of being effectively renovated. Combined with the already completed Prairie Springs Science Center Phase 1, it will be the center of the College of Science and Health, accounting for nearly 50% of the UW-L student enrollment.

The Department of Administration has approved a \$5.6 million contract for architectural and engineering services, so the project is shovel-ready. It would provide a local economic impact during the building phase and provide long-term impact through the creation of much-needed graduates for years to come.

Prairie Springs Science Center/Cowley Hall Demolition is an investment that makes sense now and in the future. We urge you to give this project a top budget priority.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Hardie".