Committee: Keep ‘Hiawatha’

Council will consider the issue in February

By JOAN KENT

A city committee broke its deadlock Thursday and voted to support keeping a 15-foot American Indian statue in Riverside Park.

The La Crosse Common Council will consider the recommendation by the Committee to Consider the Future of the Statue Hiawatha at its February meeting.

A Dec. 4 vote by the committee had ended in a 4-4 tie, which would have referred the matter to the council with no recommendation.

But Committee Chairman John Satory called another meeting when he learned that several members had not received notice of the Dec. 4 meeting. While other members found out through other channels, member Dan Libke said he did not learn of the meeting until after it taken place.

Libke, a home schooling coordinator for the Ho-Chunk Nation, cast the extra vote for retaining the statue.

The recommendation also calls for the city to refurbish and maintain the statue. A plaque would be placed near the statue, and the Parks and Recreation Department would set up a special fund for contributions to the statue’s repair and maintenance.

The colorful 20-ton concrete statue, built by the late artist Anthony Zimmerhakl, has been in the park since 1961. It has deteriorated and will cost thousands of dollars to restore.

Joining Libke in voting for the statue were council members Satory and Mark Johnrud, Steve Kieckwacz, who represents the family of Anthony Zimmerhakl, and Dean Morton, a retired cable company executive.

In a memo to committee members, Libke said Ho-Chunk elders have said they do not find the statue offensive. “The Ho-Chunk elders have spoken and, because they and their wishes are to be respected, I vote the statue to stay. No matter what my personal views on the statue are, I will never go over the head of the elders. It is simply a matter of respect.”

While names such as the Redskins offend him, he does not think names named the Indians or Braves were meant to be.

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Council fills vacancy

The La Crosse Common Council on Thursday appointed Todd A. Olson to fill the Fourth District council seat.

Six people applied for the seat, which has been empty since Betty Woodcut retired in October because she moved out of the district.

The 34-year-old Olson, of 606 Avon St., works for a pharmaceutical company. He was sworn in after receiving 18 votes. James B. Michael of 412 Avon St. received seven votes.

Olson will serve through April 17, a week after spring elections are held.

So far, seven people have taken out papers to run for the seat. They have until Jan. 3 to file for the April 15 election.

Others who have taken out papers are Jacob L. Stoll, 718 Kane St.; Mark Fritzmeyer, 912 Avon St.; Jeanne Scharr, 376 Kane St.; Jeff Nemish, 429 Island St.; and Bill Kaara, 732 Liberty St.

Statue

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derogatory, he said.

"I am one-quarter Norwegian," Libke added. "Am I going to try to tear down the Viking statue in Westby?"

Voting to remove the statue were Marian Blackdeer and Matthew Stewart, members of the Native American Student Association at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse; Vicki Monk, a Park Board member; and Ernie Bochardt, regional archaeologist for the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center.

Blackdeer and Stewart read a resolution to remove the statue, asking that the committee "recognize the necessity for accurate history and respect for native peoples, encourage continuing pursuit of greater education about Native Americans, past and contemporary, and enhance an atmosphere of mutual respect to include all people in the La Crosse area."

Because the resolution to keep the statue had passed, no vote was taken.

Mayor John Medinger, who attended the meeting, said a minority report could be given to the council.

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