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For Immediate Release

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### **Monona Reaches Agreement with St. Norbert Abbey to Purchase nearly 10 Acres on Lake Monona**

The City of Monona has reached agreement with St. Norbert Abbey of De Pere to purchase the historic San Damiano property at 4123 Monona Drive. The purchase agreement, in the amount of \$8.6M, was unanimously approved by the Monona City Council at the September 8th meeting. Pending approval by the Vatican as required by canon law, if all goes as planned Monona will take ownership of the property in June 2021.

“We are very excited to have reached an agreement with St. Norbert Abbey to purchase the San Damiano property. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Monona to significantly increase public access to the lakefront and waters of Lake Monona in addition to increasing our public open space. While Monona enjoys more than four miles of shoreline, over eighty percent of Monona residents would not have lake access were it not for our smaller parks and launches. It will be a tremendous asset for the City,” said Monona Mayor Mary O’Connor.

At just under ten acres, San Damiano includes over 1,000 feet of frontage on Lake Monona. Much of the grounds are wooded. The house and property are part of the original farm developed by Allis-Chalmers heir Frank Allis in the 1880’s. The land, as is true of much of the area, was originally inhabited by Native Americans, including ancestors of the Ho-Chunk Nation. After it was given to the Norbertines in 1929, it was used as a Norbertine Novitiate and house of studies and later was leased to the Capuchin Province of St. Joseph as a retreat house and home for elderly religious. During the latter period, the property came to be known as San Damiano Friary.

The Norbertines announced their intention to sell San Damiano earlier this year. In March, Monona reached an understanding with the Abbey to provide a six-month window so the City could determine the feasibility of raising private and public funds for purchase of the property.

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Over the last six months, in addition to hearing from many local residents, city-hired consultant, David Allen and members of a small steering committee, have met with various community members and representatives from a variety of governmental, environmental and philanthropic organizations to gauge their interest in supporting such a purchase. The consensus from those meetings was that the property should be preserved as a public asset and that there are groups and individuals who would like to financially contribute to that effort. Comments received on the potential purchase included:

- “it would be criminal for it to be privately developed for the enjoyment of only a few,”
- “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,”
- “the public access to the Lake and the preservation of the views is as large of an opportunity as I can see us ever having,”
- “a public space cherished for generations to come, much as Winnequah Park is now.”

A referendum is being considered for the ballot in April 2021, prior to closing, to further gauge community support for the preservation of the property. More information will be forthcoming.

Public funding from the County and State will be pursued in support of the purchase. In addition, the City and a newly formed not-for-profit called, Friends of San Damiano, intend to move forward with a capital fundraising campaign in support of the site’s master planning, development as a treasured Lake Monona destination, and eventual operations. Generating significant private funds will be critical to the City’s ability to purchase and develop the site for the enjoyment of all. "I'm so happy for Monona. It was truly our one and only chance to save this unique property for everyone to enjoy. The Friends of San Damiano is proud to be a part of a city effort to preserve this green space and we look forward to partnering with the City to envision a wonderful experience for future visitors and raise the necessary resources," said Friends President, Andrew Kitslaar.

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## ST. NORBERT ABBEY

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **SAINT NORBERT ABBEY SELLS PROPERTY TO CITY OF MONONA**

DE PERE, Wis. – (September 9, 2020) Saint Norbert Abbey and the City of Monona agreed to the sale of a 10-acre parcel of land on Lake Monona. Both parties began a discussion of the sale seven months ago and agreed to work together to help preserve the last open piece of lakefront property. The agreement was approved by the Monona City Council on Sept. 8, 2020. The Norbertines also need to seek approval of the Vatican in Rome.

“We Norbertines are happy to partner with the city to be able to offer this green space on the east shore of Lake Monona for the benefit of the citizens of Monona. As it had been for us for many years, this oasis can provide people with a peaceful place of rest and recreation,” stated Abbot Dane Radecki, O. Praem., Abbot of Saint Norbert Abbey in De Pere, Wisconsin.

In the fall of 2019, the Norbertines affirmed its decision to place its property up for sale. The house on the property served as a student house for Norbertine seminarians for many years and later Norbertines studying at the University of Wisconsin lived there. However, in recent years, the students of the order chose to study elsewhere. Without students, the Norbertines decided that to invest in renovation of the house served no purpose. The interest of the City of Monona came just after the Norbertines determined to put the property up for sale.

In 1929, Johanna and Margaret Mahoney deeded the Lake Monona property to the Norbertines. Due to the need for space, the Norbertines sent first-year seminarians there, establishing the house as a Norbertine Novitiate. In 1958, when the Novitiate moved back to De Pere, it became a Norbertine House of Studies for graduate students. In 1975, the Capuchin Province of St. Joseph began to use the house for retreats and a home for their elderly. During this time the house was called the San Damiano Friary.

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