Dec. 17, 2019

From: Kimera Way – President, Eau Claire Community Complex, Inc.
To: News Media

**Sonnentag Complex Project Development Group Announces Major Change**

Eau Claire Community Complex, Inc. (ECC), the developer of the Sonnentag Complex project on Menomonie Street, announced today that the Eau Claire Community Complex Board has determined the facility is unable to proceed with the Chippewa Valley Family YMCA as a participant. While the ECC Board has determined the project is unable to proceed with the YMCA as a participant, all parties (YMCA, UW-Eau Claire, Mayo Clinic Health System) remain committed to ongoing current collaborations and are open to possible future collaborations.

According to YMCA Executive Director Theresa Hillis, there are several reasons the YMCA is no longer able to be a participant in the project. As the current project timeline calls for ground breaking in summer 2020, with the YMCA’s guiding principle that construction could not begin until fundraising for the YMCA’s portion of the project was substantially complete, it raised concerns that significant capital debt could put the long-term fiscal well-being of the YMCA at risk to deliver on their mission.

“As stated by the ECCC Board, every partner in the project has its own needs, requirements, and governing policies. The current project timeline, and adhering to the principle that we cannot build what is not funded, led to the decision the YMCA is unable to proceed,” Hillis said.

ECCC also announced that, while the project is unable to proceed with the YMCA as a participant, the other project partners – UW-Eau Claire, Blugold Real Estate, and Mayo Clinic Health System remain fully committed to the project.

The Sonnentag Complex project includes a multi-purpose major event center, a recreation and fitness facility, and Mayo Clinic Health System sports medicine, imaging and human performance clinic. As originally envisioned, the YMCA and UW-Eau Claire would have shared the recreation and fitness facility which was intended to replace the existing YMCA on Graham Avenue and expand recreation and fitness facilities for UW-Eau Claire. Because the project is unable to proceed with the YMCA as a participant, a significant redesign of the recreation and fitness facility component of the Sonnentag Complex project will be necessary. That redesign will begin immediately, according to Kimera Way, president of the ECCC Board.

“We entered into this project in good faith and have worked closely together on the programming and design of the Sonnentag Complex – all partners have great respect for the missions, visions and goals of each of the organizations involved. And we are hopeful we will have continued opportunities to pursue mutually beneficial initiatives in the future,” Way said.

The ECCC Board will now work with remaining partners to move forward with project redesign and securing necessary approvals from Mayo Clinic Health System and University of Wisconsin System governing groups with the intent to break ground in July 2020, according to Way.
“John and Carolyn Sonnentag are rightfully anxious to see this project move forward. They made their lead gift announcement in August 2014 and the ECCC board is committed to achieving their vision for this transformative project,” Way said.

Project partners, UW-Eau Claire and Mayo Clinic Health System also issued statements reaffirming their commitment to proceeding with the Sonnentag Complex:

“UW-Eau Claire has demonstrated needs for both an event center to replace Zorn Arena and expanded recreation and fitness facilities for our students. This project will fulfill those needs, will provide additional academic programming opportunities, and will enable the university and Mayo Clinic Health System to collaborate even more closely on important research and wellness programs that will benefit our campus, community and region.”

James C. Schmidt, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Chancellor

“Mayo Clinic Health System remains committed to making the Sonnentag Center a reality. We plan to offer imaging, sports medicine, and performance training services in this new facility, as well as conducting beneficial research as part of our collaborative research agreement with UW-Eau Claire.”

Jason Craig, regional chair of administration, Northwest Wisconsin Region, Mayo Clinic Health System