

**River Falls Hydroelectric Project Public Meeting**  
**March 24, 2014**  
**Summary of Discussion with Timestamps**

**[00:00:04]** Ray French, Management Analyst

Ray welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided a brief introduction. The meeting is being recorded for the public record. He will call names from the initial sign up list to speak from the podium. Comments should be limited to about 5 minutes or less. This meeting is required by the relicensing process, so that the interested parties, resource agencies, and tribes may provide their comments on the pre-application document and resource issues related to relicensing. He continued that this is not the only opportunity for public input, and noted where you can find staff's contact information. The City's goal is for this to be an open and transparent process.

**[00:02:27]** Kevin Westhuis, Utility Director

Kevin introduced himself as Utility Director and thanked everyone for attending. He affirmed that this meeting is intended to be a listening session for everyone's comments.

**[00:03:57]** Scot Simpson, City Administrator

Scot welcomed everyone to City Hall. This meeting is not a strict public hearing and staff is here to listen. He encouraged everyone to be cognizant of the points being made and to limit repeats. He added a few more points in response to questions we have received:

- **Licensing Process:** There are three licensing processes and the "traditional" is most common, while "integrated" is the default. This is not a special exception. 8 FERC dams in Wisconsin are undergoing relicensing and 7 are using the "traditional" process. It's not because the City is looking to avoid public comment and reiterated that comments are welcome throughout the process.
- **Opportunities for Comment:** Scot continued that staff is always available to hear comments, and there are 24 City Council meetings a year to make comments on licensing and the dams. This is not your only opportunity in 30 years.
- **Possible Projects:**
  - **Bluff Stabilization at Power Plant:** This project is no longer identified by the City to be completed and was primarily related to the diesel generators that used to be at the Power Plant. This project was not related to the hydros and is no longer in the budget.
  - **Power Plant Substation:** There is a plan to move the controls for the substation out of the power plant, including for the transmission lines coming into the City. The City Council has identified as a priority to isolate and move the transmission controls. Then, the community can have a discussion about the future of the power plant building, and the future of hydroelectric generation. Staff views relicensing as an administrative matter. The Council, in its Work Plan process, has not identified the Lake George Rehabilitation Project as a priority.
- In the view of the City, relicensing is not connected to the decision about whether to keep or remove the dams. The dams can stand without the hydros.

Scot hopes this provides a good perspective on how we got to where we are today.

**[00:11:41]** Martha Piepgras

Martha voiced her support for retaining the dams to keep Lake George in place. She discussed the recreational and educational opportunities a lake can provide to families and residents. She shared her vision for the natural area around Lake George. Martha also supports keeping the hydroelectric generating capacity in place for environmental concerns.

**[00:15:02]** Judie Foster Babcock

Judie commented as a representative of 5 generations of Fosters to the community. She asked that the process include an understanding of the economic value of the project and its alternatives.

**[00:15:52]** Susan Goode

Susan commented as a landowner on the Lower Kinni. She encouraged the City to look at the fully allocated costs of the hydro operations as part of the relicensing, more than just on an operating basis. Also, from an environmental perspective, there may changes in temperature as a result of the dams.

**[00:17:41]** Andy Roth

Passed

**[00:17:51]** Francis Ogden

Francis introduced himself as a past City Engineer in River Falls and consulting engineer. He encourages relicensing of the hydroelectric facilities unless there is a major cost that would make it impracticable. He enjoys the duck and geese habitats the lakes provide.

**[00:19:50]** William Driscoll

Withdrawn

**[00:20:08]** Bob McGillivray

Bob introduced himself as a land owner on the Lower Kinni and fisherman. He would like to see what affects either retention or removal of the dams would have on the fisheries. Specifically, we should know what affect removal would have on flows, sediment, temperature, and runoff/stormwater. Would removal make the situation better or worse? A thorough study should be done before any decisions are made on what affect removal would have on the fisheries.

**[00:22:38]** Ray French, Management Analyst

Ray added that everyone who is interested may, in addition to making comments at this meeting, submit written comments to the City and FERC within 60 days of this meeting. The City will also be making note of the comments and questions from this meeting and posting them on our website.

**[00:24:03]** Keith Rodli

Keith Rodli introduced himself as a resident of the Town of River Falls and business owner on Main Street in River Falls. He commended the tour and site visit and the

openness of staff throughout the process. Keith also acknowledged his affiliation with the Friends of the Kinni, after concluding that the disadvantages of the dams seemed to outweigh the advantages of the dams. From conversations throughout the community, what's apparent is that we need the studies previously referred to. He emphasized that this is a great opportunity for a community conversation.

Other members of the group will discuss the specific studies the Friends of the Kinni are requesting. Hal Watson will talk about finances and the costs of maintenance going forward. Kent Johnson will talk about the effects of the dams on the health of the river. This is a key factor for many people. Keith continued to quote the City's Comprehensive Plan and provided his vision for cascading falls going through the community. He emphasized the need to get the right, independent studies so that we can make the right decisions as a community.

**[00:29:05] Michael Page**

Michael identified himself as a resident of River Falls, and frequent fisherman, canoer, and kayaker of the River. As part of relicensing, we should evaluate the potential recreation and tourism benefits and positive economic impacts of removing the dams. We should also consider the opportunity to avoid the drastic costs associated with relicensing the dams. He believes that the true value of the river comes from its restoration.

Michael continued to discuss the limited recreation opportunities on the Kinnickinnic within the City of River Falls. He encouraged everyone to consider the view from the Winter Street Bridge and the view from the swinging bridge over the South Fork.

**[00:34:55] Heather Davis**

Passed

**[00:35:12] Kent Johnson, Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter, Trout Unlimited**

Kent Johnson introduced himself as a frequent Kinnickinnic visitor, with 35 years of experience in water monitoring and water resources planning and management in the public sector. He is representing Trout Unlimited's Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter and the Friends of the Kinni. He also thanked Chuck Beranek for his presentation at the March 17 Utility Advisory Board meeting.

Kent continued to summarize the study requests those organizations will be submitting to assess the environmental impacts of the City of River Falls hydropower facilities. They address existing information gaps within five environmental categories:

- Temperature: Recommended studies will better determine temperature impacts of the hydropower facilities on Lake George, Lake Louise, and downstream of the Kinnickinnic River. The Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter has been monitoring water temperature at 7 locations on the river since 1992. The future impact of climate change on the water temperature needs to be a major consideration during relicensing because the hydropower facilities are already warming the river.

- Hydrology: Recommended studies will determine whether the City has been meeting the run-of-the-river requirement as part of its license, which is critical for maintaining downstream aquatic habitats and biological communities
- Water Quality: Recommended studies will examine the extent to which the hydropower facilities are impacting water quality in Lake George, Lake Louise, and Lower Kinni.
- Biology: Recommended studies will examine the extent to which the hydropower facilities are impacting the aquatic and biological communities in Lake George, Lake Louise, and the Lower Kinni.
- Implications for Storm Water Management: Recommended studies can help determine whether removal of the dams will have significant benefits on the City's future storm water management efforts.

As part of the study requests, the groups will provide a summary of existing monitoring work and information relative to the river for the studies, and a summary of existing data. Kent emphasized that these studies will be critical to help to answer key questions related to the environmental impacts of the City's hydropower facilities. He thanked the City for the opportunity to provide comments at this stage of the process.

**[00:43:34]** Randy Thoreson, National Park Service

Randy introduced himself as a member of the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. He commented that the three areas that stand out are collaboration, consideration, and evaluation throughout the study process.

**[00:45:09]** Katie Pata

Comments have been represented.

**[00:45:17]** Ben Hamilton

Passed

**[00:45:29]** Cheryl Laatsch, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Cheryl introduced herself to the group, and to let everyone know that the WI DNR will be intimately involved in the consultation process, including certifications, should the City pursue relicensing of the project.

**[00:46:12]** John (Duke) Welter, Trout Unlimited

John introduced himself as the Midwest Conservation Coordinator for Trout Unlimited. He provided examples of other communities' visions for dam removal, such as Baraboo, Colfax, Merrill, and West Bend. John continued by describing the community dialogues that occurred in each of their communities, and how they resulted in dam removal. He echoed the visions described by Michael Page, a previous speaker.

John added that other communities have begun to take advantage of the recreational opportunities available from a healthy river, such as Menomonie and Eau Claire. A 2008 study by Northstar Economics found that the impact of recreational angling in the Driftless Area was about \$1.1 billion per year. He concluded by commending the community discussion that is taking place.

**[00:53:50]** Dave Fodroczi, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust

Dave introduced himself as the Executive Director of the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust. He discussed the numerous ways the KRLT continues to be a partner to the community and City in preserving and promoting the river. He said he would be interested in further dialogue with the City regarding the pre-application document and the process. Dave commented that there has been significant regional study and that there might need to be more site-specific study as a part of this process. He asked for an opportunity to listen more to the City and interested parties about the issues that need to be studied.

**[00:58:23]** Kevin Westhuis, Utility Director

We will get the information on the website and make an effort to reach stakeholders during the consultation process.

**[00:58:49]** Ray French, Management Analyst

That concludes the speakers list. If you would still like to comment, please come forward and state your name for the record.

**[00:59:25]** Hal Watson

Hal identified himself as a resident of River Falls and former member of the Plan Commission and City Council. He commended the process and those involved, and appreciated that it has been non-confrontational. He believes that the coming decisions will be better for everyone's involvement. Hal's goal for the process is to make sure there is a full discussion of the pros and cons of relicensing, and that we have a community discussion that results in a final decision on the future of the dams.

Hal's specific concerns revolve around the need to get a thorough understanding of the expenses of the hydro operations. At least two financial studies are needed. Additionally, the process of relicensing can be expensive and should be factored into the analysis. The first study is the profitability and financial performance of the hydros as they have been run for the last 30 years, from 1989-2014. He challenged the perception that our hydros are profitable because of past capital improvements and continued maintenance costs.

Secondly, we will also need two financial models with reliable predictions of profit and loss. This should include engineering estimates of (1) the lifespan and repair schedule of the dams, and (2) the costs of decommissioning or removing the dams. The first option is keeping the hydroelectric facilities and upgrading them as needed until 2014. Questions that will need to be answered include how much electricity the hydros will provide in 2048, whether bluff stabilization still needs to be addressed, the impacts of existing seepage and leakage, and how the substation upgrades relate to the hydros, and life of the re-facing on the Junction Falls Dam.

The second option is exploring what happens if we decommission and remove the dams. What are realistic estimates for removal of the dam structures? What is needed for an updated Lake George Recovery Plan? What could be done from the real estate that the City owns? How much is the site worth? And what are the economic benefits for

business, tourism, recreation, and redevelopment? These are questions many in the community have, and he looks forward to continuing the discussion.

**[01:11:55]** Luke Grube

Luke introduced himself as a long-time resident of River Falls. He thinks another issue we need address is the silt at the bottom of the lakes. We should complete a grid mapping of the lake with the depths of the silt indicated, and some chemical analysis done. He suspects much of the silt is contaminated due to agricultural runoff and stormwater from City. How much silt is there and what would it cost to remove it? Luke also commented about the wildlife present at Lake George.

**[01:14:21]** Jarod Blades

Jarod introduced himself as a new resident of River Falls and Professor of Conservation and Natural Resource Management at UWRF. He thought the process has been successful so far because of the focused involvement by the community. He emphasized the concept of decision space, and he encouraged the City to make it clear what are the bounds of the decision that's going to be made with the process. What is on and off the table, and why.

Jarod also discussed the concepts of cumulative impacts and the consideration of externalities. There are also additional opportunities for expanded public involvement in the decision-making processes. He commented that the City is on the right track to taking a comprehensive look at the biological, physical, social, and economic impacts. Jarod thanked the City for having the students at the public meeting and said it is an invaluable opportunity for them to learn.

**[01:17:56]** Jack Haren

Jack identified himself as a new resident of River Falls, and the Chief of Media for the UWRF student group Environmental Corps of Sustainability, which advocates for campus divestment in fossil fuels. He commented that they and other students have an ear in the process.

**[01:19:26]** Tony Stifter

Tony introduced himself as a resident of Minnesota and past resident of River Falls. He provided the observation that the day you install a dam is the day you make a commitment to remove the dam. The benefits of a dam are realized early, and the costs increase over time. The sediments build up and issues will continue rise. Everything will need to be dealt with eventually.

**[01:20:47]** Nick Utrup, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Nick introduced himself as a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He commented that the US FWS is present as a participant agency, and that the Service provides federal to federal consultation with the National Park Service. They will be providing written comments as part of the process.

**[01:21:35]** Shawn Helling

Shawn introduced himself as a 23-year resident of River Falls and has been fishing the Kinni for 15 years. Between the upper and lower dams, he has caught several different species of fish. He has only caught trout above the upper dam, and considers the dam as a protective barrier against invasive species. He wants to make sure we know removing the dam would be the smartest decision for preventing the spread of invasive species of fish.

**[01:22:49]** Scot Simpson, City Administrator

Scot commented that they will not be providing a conclusion to the meeting with any decisions. Feel free to e-mail your comments and they will be considered. Staff will determine how to proceed with the next steps. The City Council will also continue to provide staff with direction and whether this is a priority project.

Staff will collaborate with stakeholder organizations and agencies on identifying the proper studies for the relicensing. The City has ample financial data available and continued analysis will likely show that the avoided electric cost purchased will be more than the ongoing maintenance and depreciated capital costs. He looks forward to the process over the coming years.