



*CITY OF RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN
COMMON COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS*

**COMMON COUNCIL WORKSHOP REGARDING
LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2021**

February 9, 2021

Mayor Dan Toland called the workshop to order at 5 p.m. in a virtual format due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The City Council Chambers was open for public to attend.

City Council Members Present: Todd Bjerstedt, Sean Downing, Christopher Gagne, Scott Morrissette, Diane Odeen, Ben Plunkett, Hal Watson

Staff Present: City Administrator Scot Simpson; IT Specialist Jon Smits; Assistant City Administrator Jason Stroud; City Attorney Chris Gierhart; Assistant to the City Administrator Brandt Johnson; others

City Administrator Scot Simpson noted the information was assembled by Assistant to the City Administrator Brandt Johnson who was available to co-present.

Simpson said the Wisconsin State Legislature met January 4 for the start of their bi-annual legislative session. The session generally runs from January through May with one to two weeks monthly where there are floor periods with a break in the summer. Simpson said they are a 'part time' legislature.

Simpson talked about the Joint Finance Committee which is comprised by party with 12 republicans and 4 democrats. The governor assembles the budget and presents it. A slide was provided with the names of the members of the Joint Finance Committee and the City's state and federal delegates.

Simpson said the purpose of legislative priorities are so the City speaks with one voice. It helps staff understand the Council's priorities. He talked about larger cities having lobbyists.

Simpson talked about the City's legislative priorities which include:

- Legislative improvements to the emergency detention process
- Support increased funding for state-local transportation system
- Legislative modification to allow for true biennial budgeting including multiyear levies in even-numbered years
- Allow for financing of 10+ years without a referendum
- Allow sharing between tax increment districts
- West Central Wisconsin Biosolids: Wisconsin DNR Clean Water Fund – WDNR regionalization grant

Aldersperson Morrissette asked about the ½ mile rule regarding TIDs. Simpson said it relates to the ability to spend outside of the boundary of the TID. Simpson gave an example of how it would work between TIDs.

Simpson talked about the City's legislative funding priorities which include:

- West Central Wisconsin Biosolids improvement – Phase 1: \$16.3 million; Phase 2: \$2.4 million
- UWRP Science and Technology Building - \$115 million state project
- Kinni Corridor Implementation – Powell Dam removal: \$1 million; restoration due to removal: \$1 million; downtown stormwater plan: \$3 million

Morrisette asked about UWRP Science and Technology Building. He asked about the university's PILOT and would it be improved? Simpson said the formula is based on the university's property value. It would increase the payment for municipal services.

Alderson Downing asked about support for increased funding for state-local transportation systems. He felt there would be a good amendment to the item by adding 'bridges' to it. He was curious about what other Councilors thought. Simpson would also be interested in feedback. Powell Avenue wasn't included as a separate funding priority. He said STH 29 and CTH FF roundabout was not included.

Simpson listed other priorities which were not included:

- COVID relief funding
- Energy assistance funding
- Restoration of local zoning authority
- Eliminate Town incorporation loophole
- Close dark store loophole

Simpson was interested in Council feedback. He talked about the Powell Avenue bridge. He feels that City staff and DOT staff have an agreement on the Powell Avenue bridge being slated in 2022 or 2023. Every county gets allotted bridge dollars.

Assistant to the City Administrator Brandt Johnson asked if the Council could rank their choice of funding priorities. Simpson felt it would be helpful to know the Council's priorities.

Alderson Odeen said improvements to the emergency detention process should be top of mind as it has been a problem for years. It's a threat to the health of our community and takes law enforcement's resources away from us.

Alderson Watson asked for prioritization of the Powell Dam removal, restoration, and corridor plan. It is a decision that was made in the workshop. All the projects are worthy, but we are on the hook as a community for Powell Falls and the corridor.

Alderson Bjerstedt asked if there was a problem using monies earmarked for certain projects to be used for other projects. Can we make that work? Simpson said the bridge money comes from a federal tax, so they like to keep it separate. If we don't use bridge money from the state, we would have to likely use other transportation money. Bjerstedt asked about the bridge and dam removal being connected in terms of process. Simpson clarified that it was the Powell Avenue bridge.

Morrisette asked a follow up question about the Powell Avenue bridge funding from property assessments. Could that be used in the transportation pool? Simpson said no, the developer capital cannot be used. There are specific projects outlined for that.

Downing asked again about making an amendment to add the bridges. Simpson felt Downing's suggestion to add bridges to the City's general policy ask on transportation makes a lot of sense. He felt it was positive and that DOT would see it as non-confrontational. Simpson talked further about establishing working relationships with state officials and the process. Downing asked about making an amendment to slide 12 to add it. Simpson said it could be done but is not necessary as no action is being taken and there is no resolution to work off of - Council is just providing direction. This will come back to in another meeting. If there is no objection by fellow Councilors, Simpson thought adding the bridge language makes sense. There was support by other Councilors including Watson and Odeen.

Alderson Plunkett felt the City is ignoring the biggest issue impacting its future as a city and regional economy and that is the pandemic. He feels the governor and legislature needs to act and quit ignoring the problem. Plunkett thinks we are enabling the problem by ignoring it as a Council. He said proper PPE needs to be distributed to residents to help alleviate the pandemic and the hundreds of billions of dollars for the ongoing

medical care that is necessary for the survivors. We are doing a disservice to our residents by not looking out for their best interests.

Watson asked if Plunkett wanted it added as a paragraph in the priorities and asked for clarification. Plunkett felt it should be a future agenda item open for public comment. The Mayor asked Watson if his question was answered. Watson said yes but was curious to hear what others thought of this topic. The Mayor asked Council for input on adding something in the legislative policy about the state supporting towns/cities with proper PPE equipment for all citizens. Plunkett thought it should be N95 masks at a low or no cost for citizens. Simpson said staff would be happy to draft something that the Council could deliberate. He said Plunkett's suggestion is up to the Council and spoke about other possible items to include. Simpson said when staff talks to legislators, we are providing them information about the City's Covid response. He provided further details and asked Council for language regarding Plunkett's suggestion so staff could bring something forward for review.

The Mayor asked for other comments. Simpson clarified that staff is trying to be more efficient about legislative items and provide further details about meeting with legislators. He asked the Council if they wanted to hire lobbyists, and they did not.

Downing talked about the Wisconsin Municipal League and encouraged Council to think about local priorities. Alderperson Gagne expressed his support for what has been put together for priorities.

Assistant City Administrator Jason Stroud provided an updated about technical issues that occurred during the meeting. **The workshop concluded at 6:04 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk