



**RIVER FALLS CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP REGARDING  
STREET LIGHT UTILITY**

**June 25, 2019, 5 p.m.**

**Training Room, City Hall, 222 Lewis Street, River Falls, WI 54022**

**City Council Members Present:** Mayor Dan Toland, Sean Downing, Chris Gagne, Scott Morrissette, Diane Odeen, Michael Page, Hal Watson

**City Council Members Absent:** Todd Bjerstedt

**City Staff Present:** City Administrator Scot Simpson; Assistant City Administrator Julie Bergstrom; Utility Director Kevin Westhuis; Assistant to the City Administrator Brandt Johnson; City Clerk Amy White; Senior City Engineer Crystal Raleigh; Finance Director Sarah Karlsson; Management Analyst Fellow Dennis Dadashev; City Engineer Reid Wronski

City Administrator Simpson said the concept was introduced in 2010. He reaffirmed Council is prepared to go forward with utility.

City Engineer Wronski provided a presentation. He said it was part of the 2009 budget process but was incorporated into 2010. Spending is down on street lights due to the City's LED usage. The numbers provided in the presentation are representative of today. We would phase it in over two years. It would be like the stormwater utility.

This gets fees for service. This has been done in Minnesota. There are limited places in Wisconsin that have done this. It is not a tax but user fee which would be billed monthly on the utility bill.

In 2009-2010, public outreach included a budget workshop and Council meetings where there was discussion, meetings with City administration, a City-wide newsletter and utility bill stuffer.

Simpson talked about the rate structure considered in 2010:

- Flat rate per lot
- Flat rate per acre
- Rate per acre based on number of lights in and around various types of land uses
- Rate per acre based on cost of street in and around various types of land uses

Wronski talked about how rates could be determined, the number of lights, and the four methods used to determine cost. Wronski said last two methods got traction - going back and forth between land use and cost or land use and lights.

Aldersperson Odeen asked rates per month. Simpson wanted to figure out the direction that we are headed before staff does a lot of work. It shouldn't get worse on a macro level. He provided detail.

Wronski showed maps that documented the usage. He talked about fee-based versus tax-based and recapped actions done in 2010.

Simpson talked about the top 20 list and from the list, those in favor in favor and not.

Aldersperson Watson shared some thoughts. He wouldn't want to create an incentive to argue against decorative lighting. He suggested to go with the 100-watt bulb and be done with it. He likes the 'by land' formula as he thinks it is fair. He can't argue favoring on group over another.

Aldersperson Morrissette was in favor of land use and cost. Wronski said the Council never voted on a fee structure. He talked about resurrecting the same ordinance.

Morrissette talked about spreadsheet and taxpayer versus non-taxpayer. He talked about 49 percent of properties paying 100 percent of the lighting.

Simpson talked about percentage breakdown. He talked about benefits of street lighting. It reduces crime, car accidents, keeps community healthier, creates an environment for shopping. He talked about getting rid of street lighting by cutting by half.

Wronski passed out a spreadsheet that had rates. There was discussion about rates.

Aldersperson Downing asked how we figured out baseline. Simpson said the service utility has provided it. Downing felt it was straight forward.

Aldersperson Gagne asked about recommended rate structure. Aldersperson Page asked about different types of fees. Wronski talked about the different types of fees that Minnesota cities have. He talked about a transportation utility.

Morrissette asked about why it just isn't just a part of the electric portion of the utility bill. Simpson didn't know if the PFC would agree to it. He talked about fees. It feels like it brings more accountability to Council. If the Council doesn't feel good trade off, we need to increase the levy.

Watson is in favor. He is leaning toward land use and lights. Morrissette asked about how it is implemented.

The Mayor asked if there was a consensus. Downing was a yes. Morrissette is in favor of a phased in approach.

Simpson asked if the Council was in favor of switching out levy/fees. Wronski said the ordinance would be done first, then the fee schedule. It would be in two phases. Finance Director Karlsson provided the phased in numbers.

Gagne asked about passing an ordinance without having a rate structure. Aldersperson Odeen didn't want to staff to do a lot of work if it wasn't going to pass.

Simpson asked what the expectation is for staff regarding public engagement. He was not planning a lot of public engagement - a newsletter article, billing stuffer. What is the policy direction we are heading?

The Mayor said it will be on his and the Council's shoulders to get word out. Simpson asked if there was anything else want staff to research? Simpson said no follow up workshop was planned.

Odeen asked if a lot of more cities have done it since the first time it was considered. Wronski said most cities in Wisconsin do not have it.

Downing asked about the appeal process. Simpson said it looks like stormwater appeal. Wronski talked about a write-up in the packet on the appeal process.

There was a question on who makes up appeal committee. There was discussion about the golf course and it being a unique property for an appeal.

Wronski talked about reviewing the ordinance and how the rate was created. Simpson said the ordinance would come back in September or October.

**Upon the conclusion of discussion, the workshop ended at 6:10 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk