

LIVING OUR VALUES





Dan Toland, Mayor



Scot Simpson
City Administrator

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Dear friends,

2020 was a year like no other. It tested us as we struggled in every way imaginable. We grieve for people who lost their lives to the COVID-19 virus and for the people they left behind. We worry about those who continue to struggle with the long-term effects of the disease. We feel for those who have lost companionship, livelihoods, opportunities, and rites of passage.

But, while 2020 was a year of loss, it was also a year of hope.

We saw people come together and take care of each other in ways both big and small. We saw a community reach out to the most vulnerable among us. We saw front line workers in all segments risk their health to help the sick, teach our children, provide sustenance, and keep us safe. We saw neighbors helping neighbors and organizations and businesses stretched to their capacity to provide what we have long taken for granted.

While the pandemic raged and fluctuated, stabilized, and is now retreating, the City managed to keep its momentum by completing major projects, welcoming new development, and ensuring our financial sustainability.

How were we able to do it? Because that's what we do. We keep moving forward. That mission is reflected in our values as an organization. It was those values that gave our year direction and meaning. They also provide a framework for this report.

We couldn't do what we do without the support of this community. We want to thank you for taking care of each other during the pandemic, for following the guidelines and helping neighbors, for being patient, for adapting and doing what needed to be done – not just for your safety but for the safety of all. You are the reason we are proud to live and serve in River Falls.

A handwritten signature of Dan Toland, Mayor.

Dan Toland, Mayor

A handwritten signature of Scot Simpson, City Administrator.

Scot Simpson, City Administrator

Putting people first means caring for the health and safety of the community – that has always been the City's #1 priority. COVID-19 certainly put that value to the test.

Following Governor Evers' "Stay at Home" order on March 12, 2020, the City reorganized and refocused its efforts on fortifying core services like water, electricity, and wastewater treatment so access and efficiency would not be compromised during the health emergency. In addition, the City ensured that community members were connected to resources they needed and that local businesses were supported.

At the same time, staff created "Crushing COVID-19: A guide to recovery." While it changed and evolved over time, the guide carefully laid out how the City would move from one recovery phase to another.

Going forward, the City will continue to put people first as it:

- Continues to share public health information and updates;
- Works closely with governmental and other partners to strategize and prioritize how to utilize state and federal recovery funds most effectively;
- Updates its recovery plan as it moves through summer 2021 and beyond; and
- Implements lessons learned and adapts to a new normal.



We were happy to share River Falls' Crushing COVID-19 guide with our 600+ member organizations. The guide put forth a clear direction for phased openings in the City, backed up by realistic benchmarks and current conditions. It served as a model for other municipalities who were grappling with how to move forward in the most efficient and transparent way possible. – *Jerry Deschane, Executive Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities*



Communications

Continuous, quality communications with the public are a priority for the City, taking on vital importance during the pandemic. In addition to the "Crushing COVID-19" guide, the City maintained a one-stop-shop COVID-19 website that was regularly updated with important news and timely information and resources as the pandemic progressed.

Mayor Dan Toland began releasing weekly videos in March 2020. In all, 43 videos were produced and shared via Facebook and YouTube with views ranging from 1-5K each week. Topics included COVID-19 case information and other data; City programs and services; upcoming events; Council decisions; resources and links and, just for fun, "Pets of the Week."

Community members shared praise for the videos, commenting:

- *Thank you for the uplifting and calm facts in a time of such uncertainty.*
- *I do so appreciate these talks; good information and a positive attitude!*
- *Thank you for addressing these serious issues.*
- *Nice talk, Mayor Dan. Thanks for watching out for RF.*

PUT PEOPLE FIRST



In July 2020, River Falls Municipal Utilities (RFMU) distributed \$14,400 to local organizations for COVID-19 relief efforts with funds provided by its public energy consortium, WPPI Energy. Recipients included Treasures from the Heart/Adoray (pictured here); River Falls Food Pantry; Sporting World; and Second Chances/Turning Point.

City employees continued to support community organizations in 2020, which sometimes necessitated quick changes to adapt to challenging conditions. Activities included:

- Collecting nearly 100 units of blood during three blood drives – instead of the usual one – for which the City received an Outstanding Service Award from the American Red Cross;
- Moving an in-person staff auction online to raise over \$2,000 for the American Cancer Society and River Falls Food Pantry;
- Delivering toys, clothing items, and gift cards to a family of eight as part of the River Falls Sharing Families holiday program; and
- Partnering with the United Way of St. Croix to bring food, books, and puzzles to needy families in the region.

“

The City of River Falls has been a valued partner throughout the pandemic response. Whether it was creating community messaging, hosting a community testing site, assisting with outbreak response, or promoting vaccination clinics, City staff worked hand-in-hand with us to keep our community safe. – AZ Snyder, public health director/health officer,

Pierce County Public Health Department

A screenshot of the River Falls COVID-19 Community Care website. The top navigation bar includes links for "HOME", "CATALOG", "LIBRARY EVENTS", "RESEARCH", "SERVICES", "ABOUT", "CONTACT US", and "COVID-19". Below the navigation, there is a banner for the "RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY" with information about library closures and COVID-19 updates. The main content area features eight colored boxes representing different service categories: "COVID-19" (blue), "CITY / CHAMBER" (green), "FOOD / HOUSEHOLD ASSISTANCE" (light blue), "MENTAL HEALTH / SOCIAL SERVICES" (orange), "FINANCIAL / LEGAL RESOURCES" (dark blue), "CUSTOMER SERVICES" (orange), "BUSINESS / CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS" (green), and "COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS" (dark blue). Each box contains a small image related to the category.

After the Library closed due to COVID-19 in March 2020, City and Library staff worked together to build the Community Care website. This site helped to connect people with important information and resources on a wide range of topics, from food and housing assistance to mental health services and financial support.

Putting people first in 2020 also meant relying on valued community partners to protect lives and livelihoods. Those partnerships were many and varied and all made significant contributions. Here are three that the City relied on to provide a consistent pipeline of information and services.

County Public Health Departments

City staff met weekly with the directors of both St. Croix County and Pierce County public health offices to help each other understand and navigate through complex public health issues and guidelines.

"We relied on county health leaders to help guide decision-making regarding virus mitigation efforts and safety protocols," said City Administrator Scot Simpson. "Their partnership and support helped not only us – but our entire community – survive this crisis with their experience, patience, and compassion."

Chamber of Commerce

City and Chamber leaders worked closely together to monitor and support the economic health of the community, a strategic initiative in the City's COVID-19 recovery plan. This included staff checking in twice with 200 local businesses to provide and receive information, and working with the Chamber and City Council to establish a Recovery Revolving Loan Program, issuing 10 loans to small businesses totaling \$95,000. The Chamber and City also cohosted listening sessions for both the nonprofit and business communities.

UW-River Falls

UW-River Falls has been a trusted community partner for nearly 150 years, but even more so in 2020. Working closely with the university on mitigation efforts meant that students were as protected as possible when they were in town. The City was also proud to partner on a community testing program, which it began hosting at the Hoffman Park storm shelter in February 2020. City staff also met regularly with Interim Chancellor Connie Foster and other university leaders to keep each other informed about COVID-related issues and concerns.



Let's Do Our Part River Falls



In August 2020, a group of ten healthcare, education, business, and government representatives formed a community coalition called "Let's Do Our Part, River Falls." The group created graphics to highlight important mitigation efforts and produced seven 3-4-minute videos, where participants shared how COVID-19 had impacted their work and lives. Together, the videos have received over 55,000 views on Facebook.

Working with the City during the pandemic was an opportunity to lean on the strengths each brought to the table. From collaborative communication to community and campus outreach, our partnership allowed us to expand critical services and resources without duplicating efforts. We certainly did more together than each could have done on our own. – Connie Foster, interim chancellor, UW – River Falls

EMBRACE CHANGE



Library gets creative

Closing the Library had a huge impact on the River Falls community, and it turned their usual business model for service and delivery on its head. But Library staff adapted – and their programs thrived.

Introduced in April 2020, the popular curbside pick-up program scheduled more than 12,000 pickups over the following eight months. To keep people connected, staff provided free Wi-Fi service in the parking lot, offered new hotspots for check-out, and made computers and printers available for use outside the main doors.

In addition to featured author visits, the Library attracted speakers on the topics of racism, news bias, climate change, mental health, and job hunting. Because programs were offered virtually, patrons were able to join in on their own time, resulting in a 74% increase in adult program attendance, from 2,140 in 2019 to more than 3,730 in 2020.



Election readiness

After five elections in 10 months, City employees had a lot of practice. The elections team was well-trained with new electronic software, Badger Books, in place and working well. They were ready. Nothing, however, fully prepared the City Clerk's office for the enormous complexities presented by the November 2020 election.

The sheer volume of absentee ballots received (a 662% increase from 2016) was monumental. Add to that a layer of constant uncertainty caused by daily guideline changes and the need to take meticulous measures to keep poll workers and voters safe on Election Day while, at the same time, protecting the integrity of the elections.



The Library installed an automated material handling system allowing staff to focus on patrons rather than physically managing more than 300,000 material items a year.



Storytime with Miss Monica was a hit on Facebook, averaging about 20 households per live show. Nearly 140 virtual story times were created and broadcast in 2020.

Technology steps up

As a result of the foresight, planning, and early technology investments by City Council, River Falls was well-positioned to quickly embrace new challenges.

IT staff had been working over the past couple of years to install Cloud-based software and train employees, readying them to connect quickly and easily during the transition to remote work. In addition, remote meeting software had been approved and implemented prior to the pandemic, allowing staff, City Council, Plan Commission, and Utility Board to hit the ground running. As a result, not a single Council meeting was missed. From March 2020-April 2021, staff hosted more than 100 virtual meetings.

IT Department 2020: By the numbers

225 card access to 69 doors	145 end users	17 network switches	176 desktops and laptops	40 security cameras	1,294 help desk tickets
30 wireless access points	48 cell phones	14 iPads	20 servers	New Police Station: 17 security cameras, 13 wireless access points; and 27 door card readers	



Courtesy Norm Walker



Keeping busy

Even with ever-changing health restrictions that caused many logistical challenges, Parks & Rec staff was still able to:

- Open the Glen Park splashpad;
- Organize 400 swim lessons;
- Welcome over 200 youth to 17 summer camps;
- Manage a full campground; and
- Handle over 500 reservation transactions for event spaces in two City parks



SERVE OUR COMMUNITY



Participants in the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new police station on March 3 were: (l-r) Jason Raverty, project manager, City of River Falls; Jon Aubart, deputy chief, River Falls Police Department (RFPD); Dan Toland, mayor, City of River Falls; Gordon Young, chief, RFPD; Scot Simpson, city administrator; Susan M. Kumferman, owner, Dell Construction Company; and Joel Dunning, principal, Wold Architects and Engineers.

PD station makes a move

On March 8, 2021, Police Department employees moved into their new station at 2815 Prairie Drive. After more than 50 years at their downtown location, space had been exhausted and it was time to move on. The City had intended to begin construction of a new station as part of its 2019-2023 Capital Improvement Plan. However, in 2018, the City Council evaluated and approved the purchase of the former RiverTowns building in Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park. Instead of spending \$7.5 million on a new 20,000 square-foot building, the City invested \$4.5 million on an extensive remodel and expansion of an existing facility.



Engine 20

The City's Fire Department received a new fire truck, Engine 20, in late January 2021. The new engine is a replacement for Engine 7, which was 32 years old and no longer met the National Fire Protection Association's specifications. An Engine Selection Committee spent more than 200 hours investigating a suitable replacement for Engine 7; a year and a half later, Engine 20 was delivered.



The City's communications department created a video to tell the story of the PD station move.

Since March 2020, it has received over 10,600 views. Watch it here: tinyurl.com/RFPDstation2021



““We were able to move into a new 27,000 square-foot location three years ahead of our schedule, which is 30% larger yet 40% less expensive than we budgeted for only three years ago.” – *City Administrator Scot Simpson*

Even during a pandemic, the show must go on. In addition to the new police station, the City completed three significant infrastructure projects in 2020. With thoughtful planning, quality partners and services, and careful execution, each reflected the City's commitment to excellence.



New substation

The newly-completed South Fork Substation includes a new underground circuit that connects to new UWRF electric facilities, increasing safety, reliability, and system redundancy for the City's largest electric customer. In addition to the university, the substation serves about 1/3 of the City's residential customers.



Wastewater modifications

In 2020, water/wastewater staff installed front-end screening on the main sewer pipe coming into the Wastewater Treatment Plant, updated electrical panels, and implemented a new aeration system in the oxidation ditches. The nearly \$2 million investment will improve reliability, lower energy costs, and increase capacity.



Jug Handle

The new "Jug Handle" on/off ramp at the intersection of Highway 35/65 and Division Street was completed in fall 2020. The project, cooperatively funded by the Federal Highway Safety Improvement Program, the Wisconsin DOT, and the City of River Falls, alleviates cross-traffic movements and reduces the risk for crashes.



During construction of the Jug Handle, approximately 2,700 truckloads – or nearly 200 truckloads per day – hauled about 40,000 cubic yards of fill to the site creating a maximum depth of nearly 33 feet.

CONSIDER FUTURE GENERATIONS

While continuing to provide excellent services and implement COVID-19 mitigations, the City kept pushing forward with housing and commercial development projects in 2020.

Housing Developments

Completed in 2020

The Depot and City Station
50 units for seniors and 24 units at market rate

1300 S. Main Street
50 one- to three-bedroom units for affordable family housing



The City is solidly moving toward its 2018 housing study goals to increase housing availability in River Falls. Find the study at rfcity.org/HousingStudy.

Housing units	2018	2019	2020
New single family	50	75	87
New multi-family	16	150	194
TOTAL	66	225	281

To follow progress on current City development projects and see available corporate/commercial properties, visit the development maps at rfcity.org/COMDEV.

Commercial Developments

Completed in 2020

Police Station
“Jug Handle” on/off ramp
M Health Fairview



Expected in 2021

Bakken-Young Funeral & Cremation Services
Falls Family Eye Care & Vision Therapy

Planned in 2021

Tattersall Distillery plans to complete its remodel of the old Shopko site in fall 2021. The distillery, along with a restaurant and event space, is expected to provide more than 100 local jobs and draw more than 160,000 visitors annually.



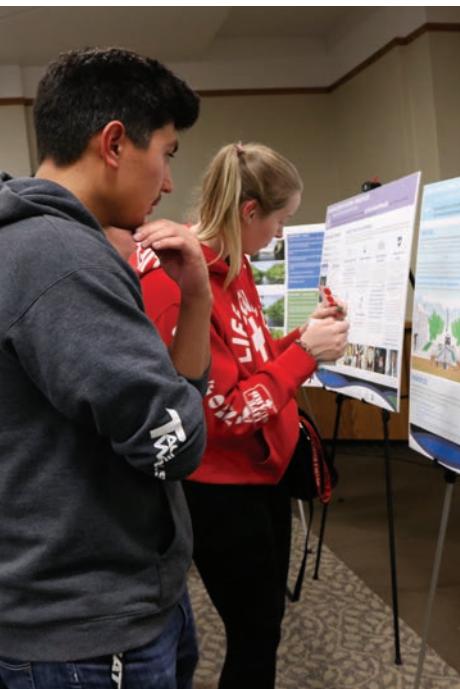
“

The City and staff were incredible to work with. It was a great feeling to have a City be as excited about our project as we were and to be so flexible and creative in their problem solving to help find solutions to bring the project to life. – **Jon Kreidler, cofounder and chief officer, Tattersall Distillery**

Comprehensive planning

In 2021, the City will begin updating its 2005 Comprehensive Plan, which guides City growth by analyzing resources and trends related to housing, business and economy, transportation, land use, utilities, parks, schools, and natural resources.

The plan will be used to project and evaluate not only new development, but also existing public infrastructure. As times change, priorities shift and new challenges require attention including climate change, socioeconomic equity, and community health.



Like it was for the Kinni Corridor Project (2016-2019), public engagement will be a major part of the plan's development.



City of River Falls Municipal Utilities held its fifth Annual Electronics Recycling Event on Oct. 17, 2020. A team (pictured here) from Recycle Technologies, Inc., worked nonstop for four hours and filled three semis and two large cargo trucks with over 66,000 lbs. of electronic recycling.

Green energy programs

On Jan. 1, 2020, the City of River Falls became the first municipality in the state to power City buildings using 100% renewable energy. The activity is part of a new campaign called Renewable River Falls to encourage and support residents and businesses in joining the City in its renewable energy efforts.

One avenue for reaching this goal is the City's Green Block program, which grew from 11.5% in resident participation in 2019 to 12.5% in 2020, making River Falls the first in the state and fifth in the nation for green energy participation.

Green blocks are units of 300 kilowatt hours (kWh) of renewable energy – a mix of solar, wind, and biogas. On July 1, 2021, the costs of purchasing green blocks will decrease from \$3/block to \$2/block, giving residents and businesses more affordable choices for purchasing green energy.



CONSIDER FUTURE GENERATIONS



Lake Louise was drained on Oct. 1, 2020, to facilitate inspection of the Powell Falls Dam following the June flood.



The City's long-term investment in stormwater management held up during the June flood, one of the worst in nearly 60 years. Staff successfully maintained 122 ponds and 2,542 structures in the system, including 50 miles of pipe.

Toward a free-flowing Kinni

Work continues on the hydro relicensing project, preparing the way for the largest infrastructure project in the City's history. A blip in the plan occurred in June 2020, when an historic flood came through town and damaged Powell Falls Dam.

Consequently, Lake Louise was drained to allow for a complete inspection. While the inspection did reveal some minor damage, the cost of repairing the dam was more than revenue that might be generated from hydroelectric production between now and 2023 when the dam and hydro are scheduled for decommissioning. Removal of both the Powell and Junction Falls Dam are anticipated in 2026 and 2040, respectively.

As part of the relicensing/decommissioning plan, River Falls Municipal Utilities staff worked with various community stakeholders on a number of hydro studies and surveys in 2020 including:



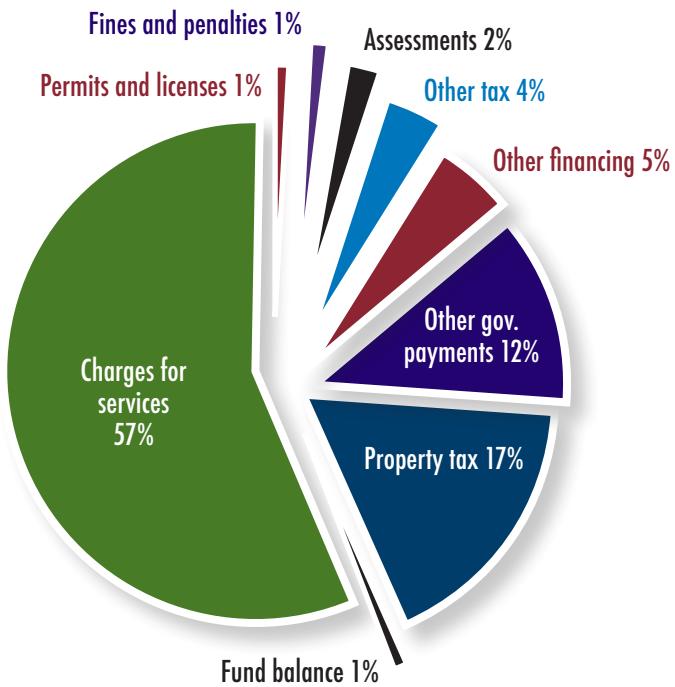
- Aquatic invasive species survey
- Archaeology and architecture surveys
- Hydraulic and hydrologic analysis
- Lake George shoreline habitat assessment
- Mussel survey
- Riverine habitat evaluation below Powell Falls
- Sediment and water quality studies

The St. Paul District Corps of Engineers Dive Team conducts a native mussel survey in the Lower St. Croix River to evaluate potential future impacts to mussels from dam removal on the Kinni.

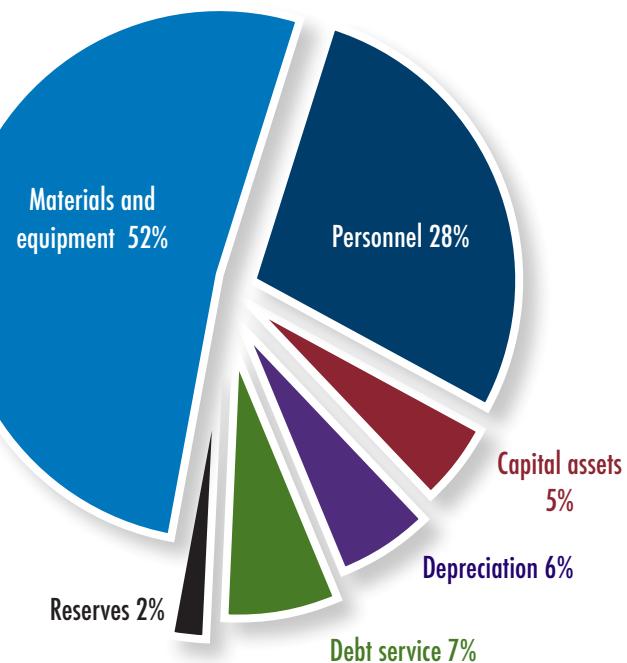
While the City maintained its positive momentum in 2020, it also pared back on operations and put some projects on the back burner. This resulted in an approximate 10% spending reduction amounting to roughly \$1 million in savings despite making progress on key projects and continuing core City services.

In November 2019, the City Council approved the City's 2020/2021 biennial budget for a total of \$82,552,737. The budget presents projected revenues and expenses that allow staff to fulfill the policies and direction determined by the Mayor and City Council, including pursuing new initiatives and strengthening services to the community.

Income



Expenses



ACT WITH INTEGRITY



Staying financially healthy in a pandemic

Managing financial resources is a complex job for any organization; adding a national crisis on top can make it overwhelming. The City's continued good financial stewardship and ability to be nimble during challenging times is noteworthy.

Some 2020 accomplishments:

- Restructured 2020 budget and 2020 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) by scenario planning and forecasting potential fiscal impact of COVID-19 and adjusting spending accordingly;
- Issued \$5,740,000 in bonds at record low interest rates, while maintaining a Moody's Aa2 rating;
- Created Tax Increment Districts 15 and 16 resulting in \$1M of City improvements in the related neighborhoods; and
- Developed a 2021 CIP and biennial budget with attention focused on cost containment without sacrificing services or future growth.

Where do your property taxes go?

Multiple funding sources support City services and operations; the majority are from user fees for electric, water, and sewer charges to customers. While the property tax levy supports City operations, it also supports other jurisdictions:



River Falls School District 39%



Pierce or St. Croix Counties 21%



City of River Falls 28%
Tax Increment Financing 7%
Chippewa Valley Technical College 4%

EMS transition

As a result of rising costs and decreasing federal reimbursements, the City began a multi-year process to evaluate the feasibility of continuing to provide ambulance services. Studies commissioned in 2017 and 2019 concluded that transitioning to a qualified non-governmental organization was the most viable alternative. On Nov. 16, 2020, Allina EMS became the new ambulance provider for the City.

Allina EMS is one of only five agencies in Wisconsin that are fully accredited by the national Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services. In 2017, they received an award of excellence from the National Association of EMTs.

t takes strong leadership to guide an organization through everyday challenges. It takes superior leadership to guide an organization – and community – through challenges that come once in a lifetime. The City is thankful for these fearless and committed individuals who kept us safe and moved us continuously forward through a chaotic and unpredictable time.

2019-2020 City Boards and Commissions

Business Improvement District Board

Joleen Larson, President
Amy Halvorson, Vice President
Kerri Olson, Treasurer
Russ Korpela
Terry McKay
Mike Miller
Jodi Nelson
Michael Pepin

City Board of Appeals

Eric Amundsen
Andrew Brown
Gary Horvath
Jeanette Leonard
Kellen Wells-Mangold

EMS Advisory Board

Carole Mottaz, Chair
Jessica Delwiche
Judy Edgar
Kent Kittleson
Ken McNiff
Scott Morissette*
Jean Wespetal
*Disbanded in May 2019
(see page 12)*

Historic Preservation Commission

Heidi Heinze, Chair
Denton Anderson
Mark Anderson
Jeff Bjork
Pam Friede
Jayne Hoffman
Michael Page*
Ben Plunkett*

Library Board

Joyce Breen, President
Rebecca Ferguson, Vice President
Kari Heinselman
Janet Johnson
Ruth Kuss
Michael Metro
Diane Odeen*
Jean Ritzinger
Wayne Roen
Whitney Rudesill
Robert Wing

Park and Recreation Advisory Board

Patricia LaRue, Chair
Brandon Dobbertin
Sean Downing*
Brenda Gaulke
Matt Janquart

Jim Nordgren Melissa Pedrini

Plan Commission
Dan Toland (Mayor), Chair
Patricia LaRue
Lisa Moody
Craig Hinzman
Craig Hofland
Rebecca Prendergast
Hal Watson*

Police and Fire Commission

Mark Sams, President
Grant Hanson, Vice President
Gary Donath
Brenda Gaulke
Jon Longsdorf
Dick Rinehart

River Falls Housing Authority

Todd Bjerstedt,* Chair
Nick Carow, Vice Chair
Matt Fitzgerald
Jacqueline Niccum
Amy Peterson

Utility Advisory Board

Patrick Richter, Chair
Mark Spafford, Vice Chair
Matt Berning
Scott Morissette*
Kevin Swanson
Tim Thum
Kellen Wells-Mangold

*Alderperson

City of River Falls Executive Team

City Administrator Scot Simpson
Assistant City Administrator Jason Stroud
Asst. to the City Administrator Brandt Johnson
City Clerk Amy White
Community Development Director Amy Peterson
Finance Director Sarah Karlsson
Human Resources Director Karen Bergstrom
Police Chief Gordon Young
Utility Director Kevin Westhuis



Mayor and City Council

Dan Toland, Mayor
District 1 Sean Downing
District 2 Christopher Gagne
District 3 Hal Watson
District 4 Todd Bjerstedt
At-Large Scott Morissette
At-Large Diane Odeen
At-Large Michael Page*
At-Large Ben Plunkett**

*Served from 2018-2020

**Elected in 2020

Mission: To coordinate and deliver essential services and ensure a sustainable future.

Vision: A distinct, vibrant, and safe community with an abundance of nature and easy access to metropolitan amenities. A place where families, students, and businesses flourish.

LIVING OUR VALUES
2020 Annual Report

Put people first
Embrace change
Serve our community
Pursue excellence
Consider future generations
Act with integrity

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