

Joining Forces for a Safer City



The newly installed push-button flashing light technology at the 8th Street and East Division Street crosswalk, just steps from Greenwood Elementary.

In September 2021, the School District of River Falls approached the City of River Falls to propose working together in pursuit of a common goal: improving pedestrian safety in the community.

Earlier that month, the District had received a donation of \$14,600 from the Dennis and Carol Ireland Family Community Fund to provide new push-button technology with specialized blinking lights at four non-stop controlled intersections near district schools. The Ireland grant came from the family's non-endowed funds set aside in the River Falls Community Foundation. The Community Foundation itself pitched in \$1,000, while the City of River Falls and the School District each contributed \$5,000.

"We've been looking at some of these intersections for some time," Mike Stifter, City of River Falls Public Works Director, said. "These locations have been identified by community members as posing particular safety concerns, and each had its own log of phone calls or emails. So, this partnership with the School District was kind of a game changer opportunity that allowed us to take action without the obstacle of funds standing in the way of doing the right thing."

The School District purchased the materials and hired a contractor to install the electric for the flashing lights, while the City installed the poles and bases for the signs. The City will also handle all future maintenance responsibilities.

The new push-button crosswalks are located on the City's West Side, at Grove Street and West Division Street; at Greenwood Elementary School, on East Division Street and 8th Street; at Rocky Branch Elementary School, on West Johnson Street and Bartosh Lane; and at River Falls High School, on 6th Street and Cemetery Road. Additionally, the City chose to install the technology at a fifth location, which it is completing independently, at the intersection of Vine Street and South Main Street. All four school crosswalks are currently in operation, while the fifth location at Vine and South Main is in progress and slated to be finished this winter.

While all five intersections previously had painted crosswalks, and three also had pedestrian crossing flags, the City and School District found that those features were often ineffective in encouraging pedestrians to look both ways and calling driver attention to individuals crossing the street. Now, with the push-button technology, pedestrians will be actively involved in their safety before stepping foot in the street. Drivers, on the other hand, will be made aware that a stop is approaching by the sensory experience of the flashing lights.

“These new signs have the potential of saving lives in our community,” Jamie Benson, School District of River Falls Superintendent, said. “This new technology is an investment that will help keep children and pedestrians of all ages safe from avoidable traffic incidents. We are grateful to the generosity of the Ireland Family, the Community Foundation, and the City for helping make this possible.”

Make sure to voice your suggestions for further improving pedestrian safety during the City's bike and pedestrian planning process! Stay up to date at engagerf.org, which will go live on January 27, for details on engagement opportunities.