



YEAR IN REVIEW

2023



@City River Falls



@City of River Falls



@City of River Falls

715-425-0900

www.rfcity.org

Dear Friends,

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the last year, we are reminded of the collective efforts that have shaped our community's story. The input, passion, and dedication of volunteers, residents, and stakeholders are invaluable as we continue to work toward a sustainable and thriving future for River Falls.

In June 2023, we conducted our biennial community survey, a tool designed to gauge public input on City services and programs. In the report, we'll focus on a few of the key areas that you identified as being of particular importance:

- **Overall Economic Health:** Strengthening our local economy remains vital. In the coming years, we will continue to foster an environment that supports business growth and innovation. This includes enhancing support programs for small businesses, attracting new industries to our area, and promoting workforce development initiatives.
- **Overall Quality of the Natural Environment and Recreation:** Preserving our natural resources is essential for the well-being of current and future generations. For instance, our continued focus on the implementation of the Kinni Corridor plan promotes environmental sustainability by increasing community connections, water quality, and both human and wildlife habitats. By protecting our natural environment, we can enhance quality of life for all residents.



Dan Toland
Mayor



Scot Simpson
City Administrator

- **Overall Quality of Infrastructure:** Investing in our infrastructure is crucial for ensuring the well-being of our residents and the prosperity of our City. We have prioritized projects aimed at maintaining and enhancing our streets, utilities, and public facilities. By modernizing our infrastructure, we can better meet the needs of our growing community.

We are carried forward by the momentum of 2023 to continue addressing these priorities, this year and beyond. We recognize that our success hinges on the continued collaboration and support of our residents and partners. Thank you for joining us in this work.


Dan Toland
Mayor


Scot Simpson
City Administrator

YOUR CITY COUNCIL



Dan Toland
Mayor



Scott Morrissette
Alderperson at Large
and Council President



Diane Odeen
Alderperson at Large
and Comptroller



Jeff Bjork
Alderperson at Large



Sean Downing
Alderperson
District 1



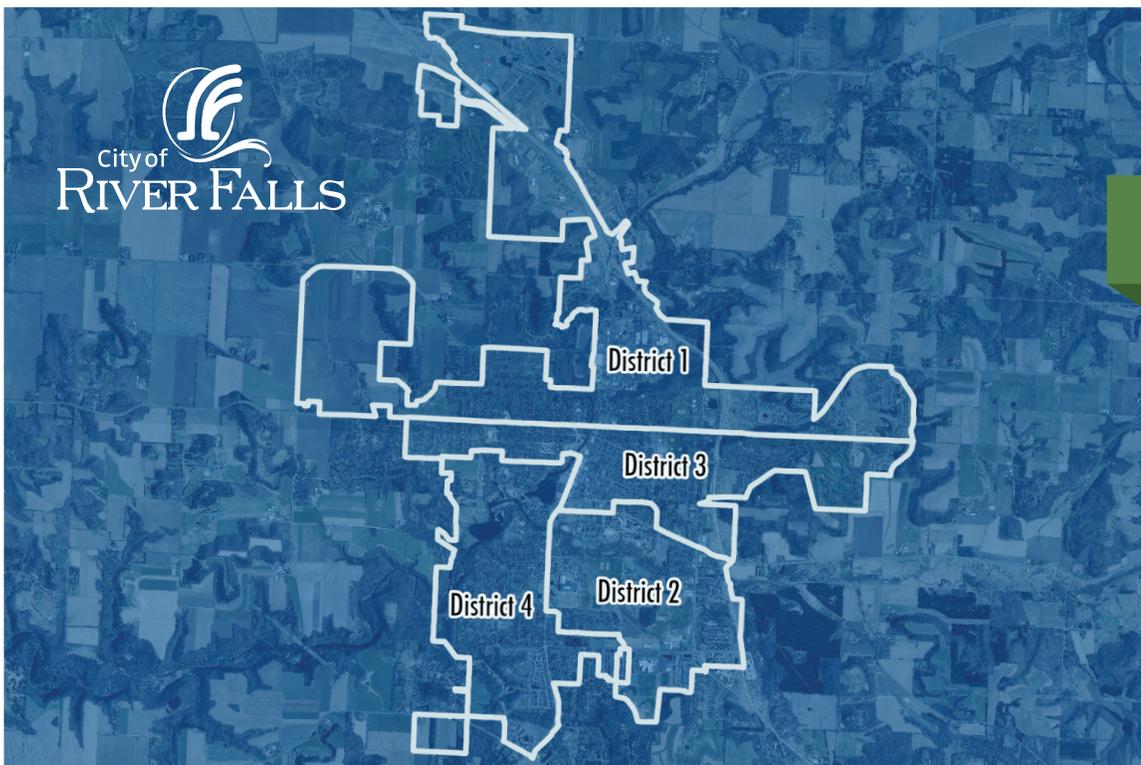
Nick Carow
Alderperson
District 2



Alyssa Mueller
Alderperson
District 3



Todd Bjerstedt
Alderperson
District 4



**JOIN US
FOR A MEETING!**



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City Council Agenda
and Meeting Dates
mayorandcouncil@rfcity.org



COMMUNITY SURVEY

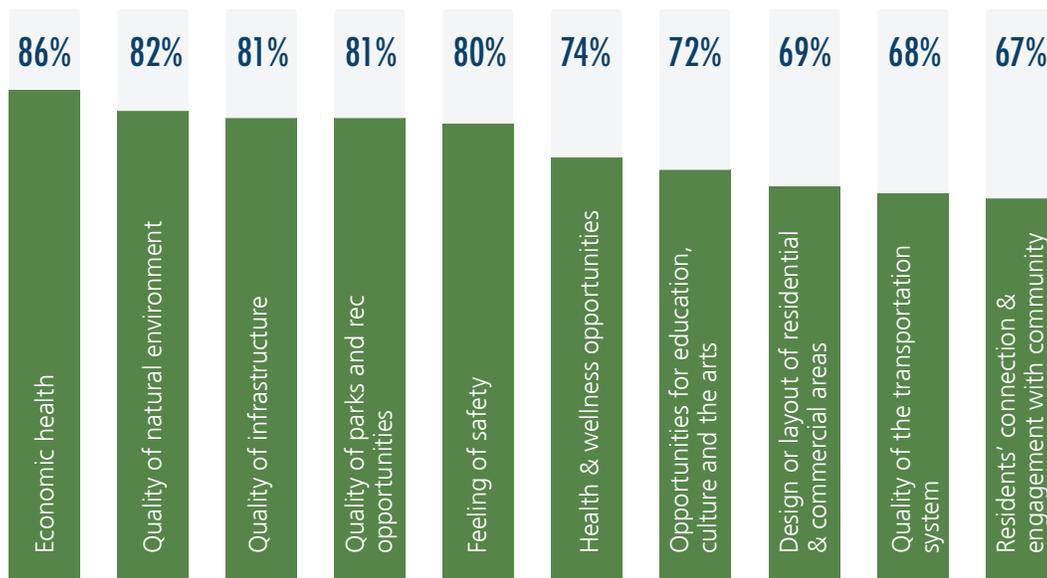
Since 2013, the City of River Falls has conducted the National Community Survey (NCS) every two years. The survey is a vital tool for collecting resident feedback on livability in River Falls. In 2023, the survey had an overall response rate of 19%. The Mayor and Council use survey results to make strategic planning decisions for the community. Consideration is given not only to the top areas of concern, but emerging and consistently identified areas as well. The City Council directs staff to engage in workflow plans and initiatives based in part on this important engagement tool. Results provide insight for the River Falls City Council, helping to inform the development of the Capital Improvement Plan, biennial budget, and more.



Scan to read the full report of results

TOP PRIORITIES

Residents were asked to indicate how important they felt it was for the City Council to focus on the following ten priorities in the next two years:



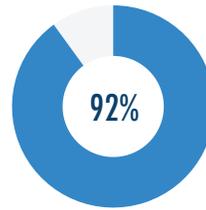
(% essential or very important)

COMMUNITY SURVEY FEEDBACK*

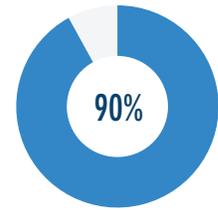
ECONOMIC HEALTH



OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE

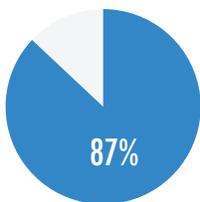


River Falls as a place to live

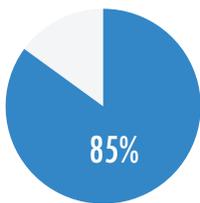


The overall quality of life

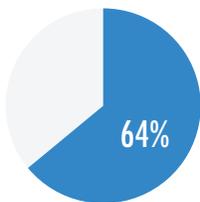
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



Overall quality of natural environment



Cleanliness of community

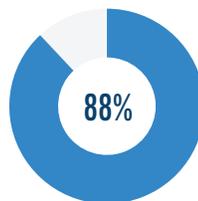


Preservation of natural areas

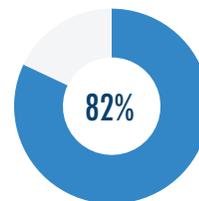
SAFETY



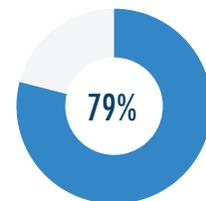
PARKS & RECREATION



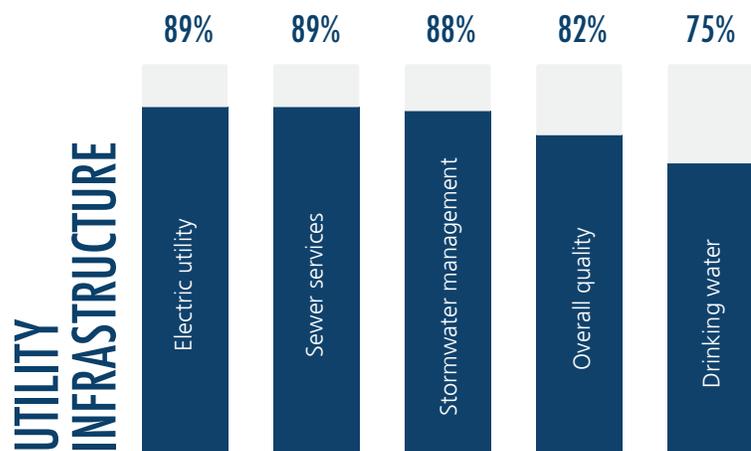
City parks



Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities



Recreation programs or classes



*The percentage displayed is the percentage of residents that rated the item "excellent" or "good".

HOUSING PROJECTS

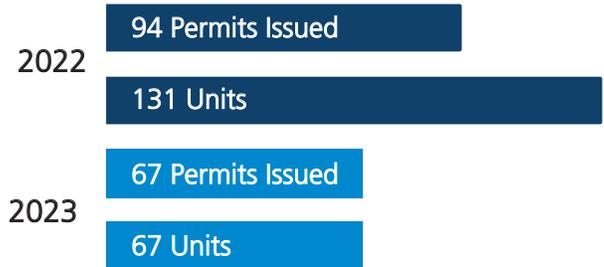


SYCAMORE OF RIVER FALLS

In 2023:

- The Plan Commission recommended the approval of 391 units.
- The Building Inspection Division issued 119 certificates of occupancy, including Lake George Lofts, Highview Meadows, Dawes Place, The Sycamore, and Wasson Lane Townhomes.
- Two recently approved multi-family projects include affordable housing units with assistance from the City. Both the Lake George Lofts and The Upland will include affordable units for individuals earning less than 50%-80% of the area median income for Pierce and St. Croix Counties.

SINGLE FAMILY *(includes twin homes)*



In addition to the residential projects initiated or completed in 2023, these commercial and industrial projects began in 2023 with the support of the Community Development Team.

- Dunkin' Donuts opened in a newly renovated building on N. Main Street.
- Swinging Bridge expanded into an adjacent storefront on Main Street.
- Blooms for Happiness relocated to a larger space on the north end of the city.
- LockTight Storage began construction on over 400 units of self-storage at Radio Road.
- Starbucks began construction on a redevelopment site on N. Main Street.
- A 108,000 square foot multi-tenant industrial building is under construction in the Sterling Ponds Corporate Park.
- BOH Electronics finished construction and began operations in a new building in Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park.

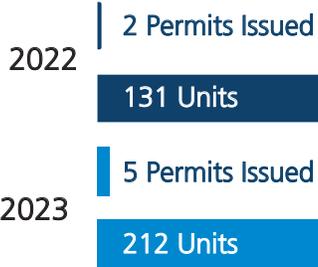


LAKE GEORGE LOFTS



WASSON LANE TOWNHOMES

MULTI-FAMILY



ADDITION/ALTERATION

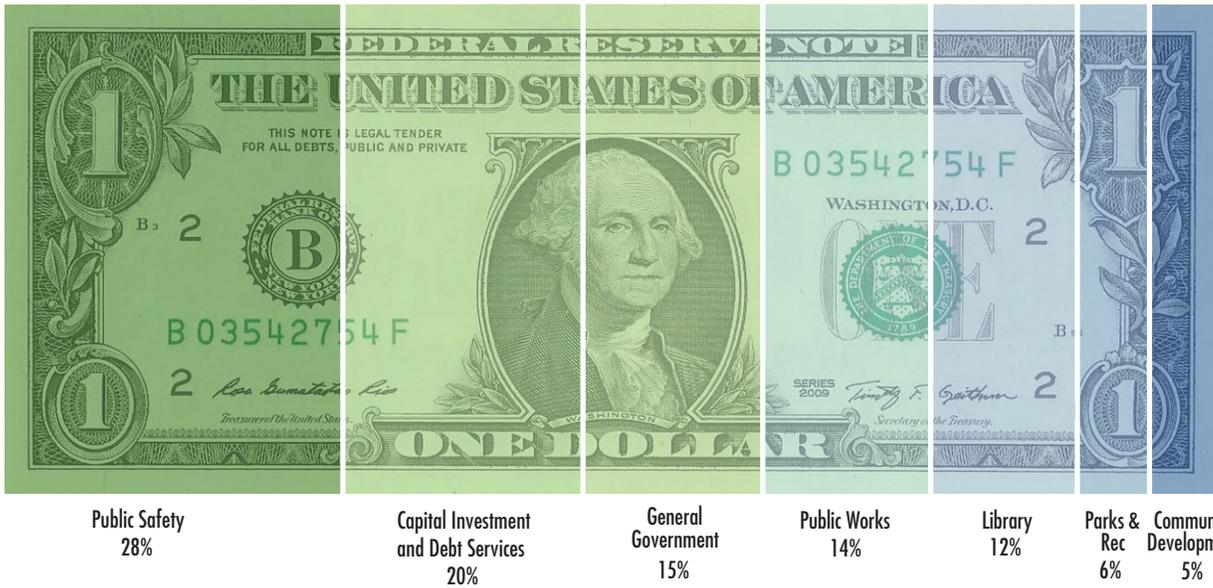


DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

CITY FINANCES

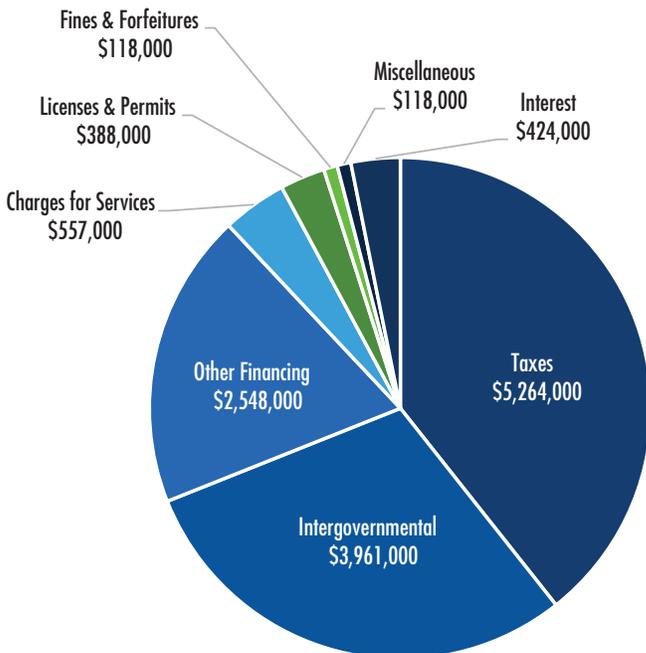
In 2023, the City navigated legislative changes at the state and federal levels that brought transformative funding opportunities and necessitated prioritizing capital investments. Rapid growth continued in the community, which underscores the importance of strategic financial planning to ensure that funding exists for increasing services demands. Due to the City Council's sound fiscal stewardship, the City is well-positioned to capitalize on these new opportunities and accommodate commercial and residential growth.

Where do your property taxes go?

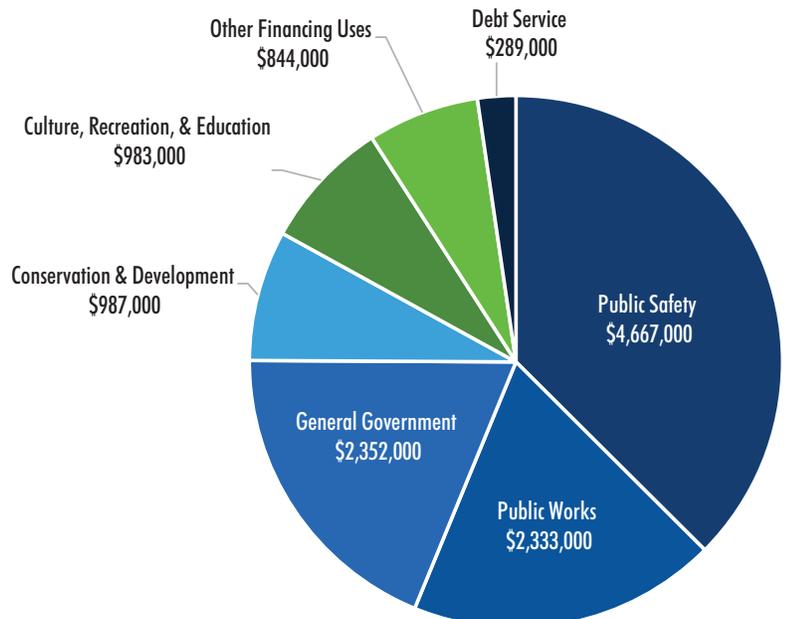


SCAN HERE to learn more

2023 City Revenue Sources



2023 City Expenses



SHARED REVENUE BILL

In June 2023, Governor Tony Evers signed AB245, known as the Shared Revenue Bill. The bill dedicates one full penny of state sales tax revenue to local governments, amounting to approximately \$530,000 in additional state aid each year to the City of River Falls. In 2024, the City will use this funding to help finance design work for a fire station. State Representatives Warren Petryk and Shannon Zimmerman and State Senators Jeff Smith and Rob Stafsholt defended this legislation, leading to this historic change. Because State income tax revenue is impacted by broader economic trends, City staff will monitor State income tax trends to forecast impacts to the supplemental shared revenue program for budget planning.



CREATION OF TID #19

On May 23, 2023, the River Falls City Council approved the creation of TID #19, which is a mixed-use district comprised approximately 380 acres located north of County Road M on the western edge of River Falls. TID #19 was created to pay the costs of streets and utility infrastructure needed to develop Mann Valley Corporate Park.

The City has seen dramatic increases in value within its other corporate park TIDs. TID #13, located in Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park, has increased in value 126% since

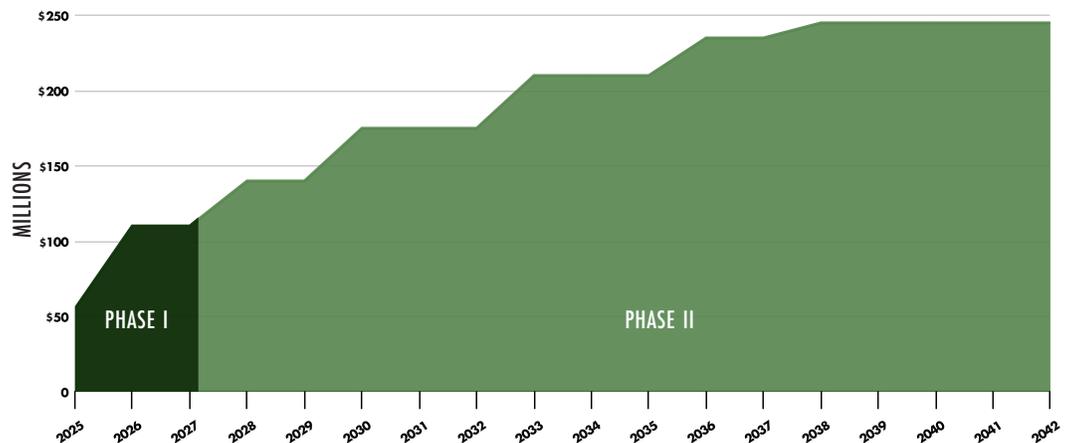
2018. Meanwhile, TID #10, located in Sterling Ponds Corporate Park, has increased in value by over 34,000% since 2014.

Mann Valley Corporate Park is estimated to add over \$100 million in new value to the city over the next five years. In the long term, based on available acreage in the park, the TID may add approximately \$250 million by the time it closes in 2044.

TID TAX INCREMENT DISTRICT

Tax increment money is allocated to the City for its use in making infrastructure improvements in the Tax Increment District (TID) during the life of the District. Funds originate from the tax money generated from an improvement or development greater than the tax generated by the site before the development.

PROJECTED DEVELOPMENT IN TID #19





CORPORATE PARK

On Tuesday, Sept. 19, the City of River Falls celebrated the groundbreaking of Mann Valley Corporate Park. Infrastructure construction is now underway and is expected to be completed in Summer 2024.

Located on the northwest side of the city, the park includes over 200 developable acres. Mann Valley will be the fourth and largest corporate park in city limits. The first, River Falls Industrial Park, was established in 1989, followed by Whitetail Corporate Park in 2000 and Sterling Ponds Corporate Park in 2014.

Since 2017, City staff have responded to 31 requests for information from businesses seeking more than ten acres. “We’re now moving onto an entirely new level because the demand is there, and that demand presents an incredible opportunity for the economic growth of our community,” Keri Schreiner, economic development manager, said.

Prior to Mann Valley, the largest lot in the city is seven acres. By contrast, the largest lot available in Mann Valley Corporate Park is 155 acres. “We are going to see big developments at Mann Valley – bigger than we’ve seen before,” Schreiner said.

The site’s concept plan, updated in 2023, includes approximately 208 acres for light industrial and manufacturing use, 10 acres of multi-family high density residential development, 37.5 acres for institutional use (owned by the School District of River Falls), a two-mile multi-use recreation trail, and 63 acres for conservancy.

“The intent is to provide a lasting and important public connection to the land going forward,” Scot Simpson, city administrator, said. “Even as private development is taking place, everyone will be able to have a place in Mann Valley.”

Pictured Above: Mayor, City Councilmembers, and State Representatives at 2023 Mann Valley groundbreaking

In early 2011, the City was contacted by River Bank about purchasing some or all of the 328 acres of vacant land it owned south of County Highway MM and east of Mann Road. River Bank acquired the property in the aftermath of the 2008 housing market crash. Previously, a private developer had planned to construct a large residential development on the land.

On Jan. 25, 2011, the City Council passed a resolution to purchase 85 acres of land from River Bank and secured a first right of refusal for the remaining 243 acres. In 2013, the City exercised its right to purchase the adjoining 243 acres from River Bank.

“Had a private developer maintained ownership of the land, our community would not have had a say in the outcome,” Simpson said. “Acquiring this land allowed the City Council to ensure that development at Mann Valley would occur in a manner consistent with the City’s vision.”

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2011

City purchases 85 acres of land in Mann Valley from River Bank

2013

City purchases remaining 243 acres from River Bank

2016

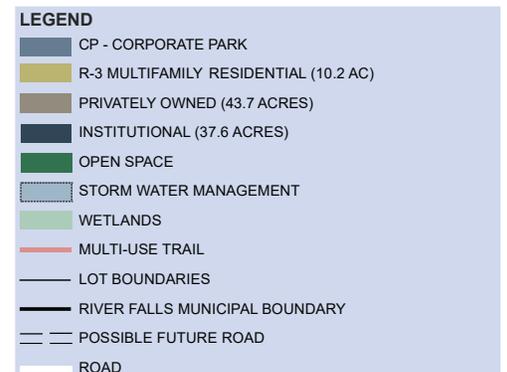
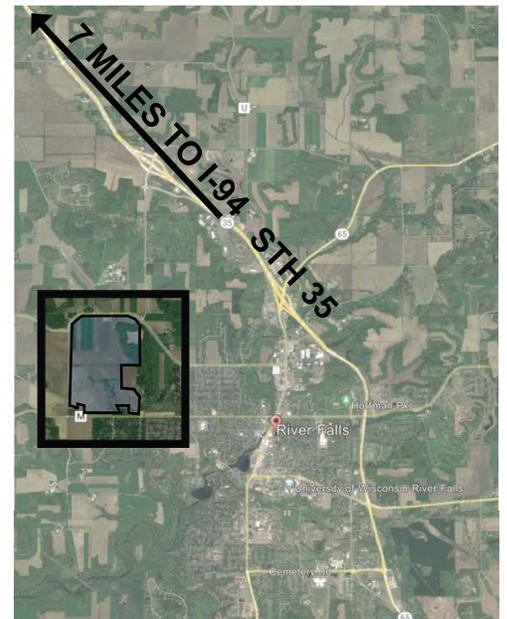
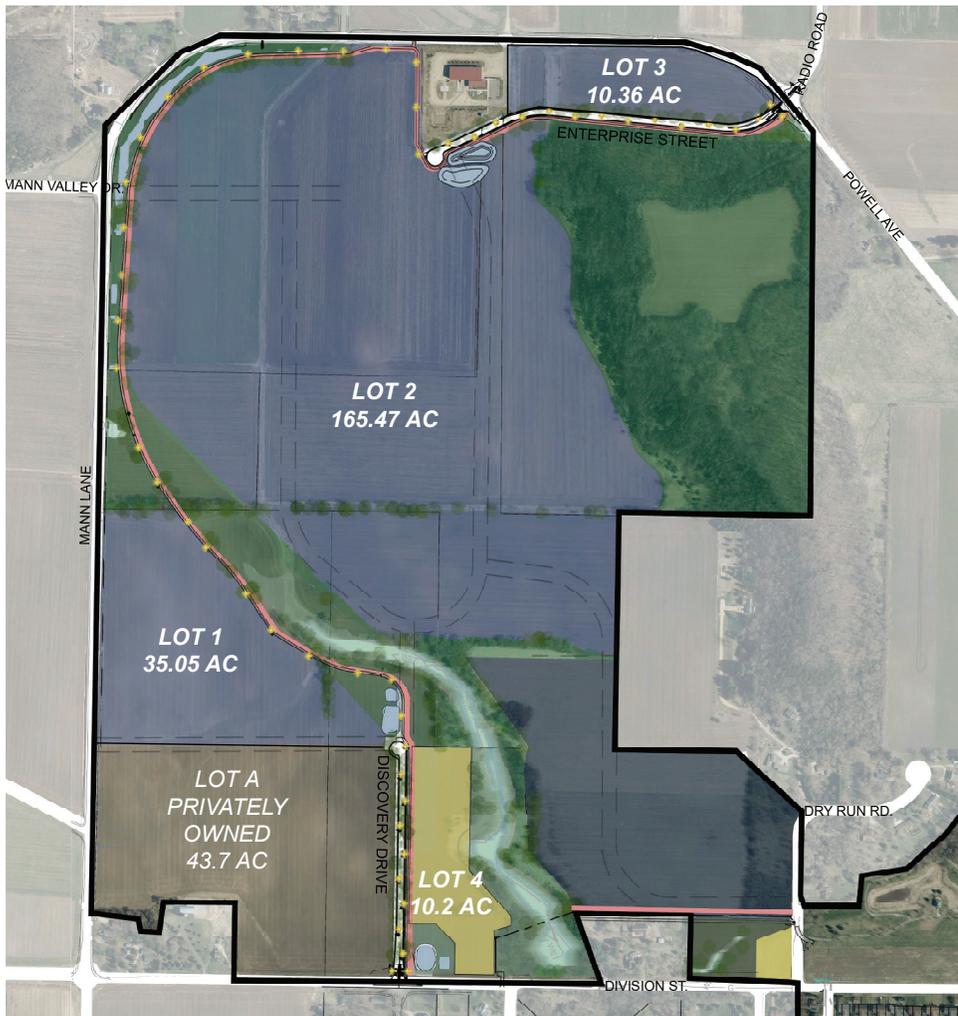
291 acres are annexed into the City of River Falls; WinField United constructs research facility on five-acre lot

2018-2021

City works with contractors to develop and finalize corporate park design plans

2023

TID #19 is created; City breaks ground with infrastructure construction



Over the remainder of the decade, City staff worked hard behind-the-scenes to ready the property for development. On May 23, 2023, among several other items, the City Council awarded an infrastructure construction contract to Haas Sons, Inc., and awarded Phase I engineering services to SEH, Inc. With contractors at the ready, the City broke ground in September 2023.

Infrastructure construction, which is now underway, includes four and a half miles of water main with a pressure reducing station, two and a half miles of sanitary sewer with a wastewater pumping station, approximately one mile of storm sewer, approximately two miles of utility maintenance/multi-use path, street and trail lighting, and 3,900 feet of roadway.

As with Sterling Ponds Corporate Park and Whitetail Corporate Park, the City Council approved the creation of a tax increment district (TID) to help fund development costs. By creating TID #19, the City is able to pay for the project with future taxes that will be collected on the TID.

Mann Valley Corporate Park is estimated to add over \$100 million in new value to the city over the next five years. In the

long term, based on available acreage in the park, the TID may add approximately \$245 million by the time it closes in 2044.

“I think a lot of residents wonder, why should I care about what’s going on in these corporate parks?” Steve Leitch, president of River Falls Economic Development Corporation, said. “The development happening in our industrial community impacts the city’s tax base, which then impacts what your personal tax obligations are. Mann Valley is poised to strengthen our economy, and that will benefit all of us.”

New commercial development in TIDs increases the city’s assessed value, which is used to calculate the tax rate. When the assessed value increases, the tax levy is spread over a larger tax base, which may result in a lower rate for taxpayers.

“The intention is for Mann Valley to be its own ecosystem that will fit right into River Falls,” Dan Toland, mayor, added. “Mann Valley is not going to change the character of the city we all love. Instead, it will only strengthen the economic vitality and livability of our great community.”



City staff Keri Schreiner, economic development manager, Todd Nickleski, city engineer, and Adam Martinson, municipal project manager, discuss infrastructure at Mann Valley



NEW TRAILS

BLAZING

As economic opportunities expand with the development of Mann Valley Corporate Park, so too will the City's trail network.

On Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024, the City of River Falls was awarded a \$306,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to help fund a two-mile multi-use recreation trail in Mann Valley Corporate Park.

"As our city continues to grow, connectivity becomes increasingly critical," Amy Peterson, community development director, said. "The trail presents not just an important way for people to get around the new corporate park on foot and bike, but also another recreation opportunity for anyone looking to get some exercise and enjoy the outdoors in River Falls."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

The trail will run north to south through the park, eventually serving as a link between DeSanctis Park, planned multi-family housing, new corporate park tenants, designated conservancy areas, and future trail connections on the north end of the city.

Mann Valley Trail comes on the heels of the new, 0.7-mile Paulson Road Trail. On Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2023, City staff and councilmembers were joined by

the St. Croix Valley Mountain Bike Team to celebrate the opening of the trail with a ribbon cutting and celebratory bike ride.

The paved path for cyclists and pedestrians connects the Sterling Ponds neighborhood and corporate park to Main Street. It begins on the west side of Paulson Road at Prairie Drive, near the police station, and extends north to Radio Road. From there, pedestrians



BLAZING N

and cyclists can continue east on the existing off-road paved trail over State Highway 35 and continue into Sterling Ponds.

Construction of both Paulson Road Trail and Mann Valley Trail were included as action items in the City's Bike and Pedestrian Plan to help address gaps in the city's transportation network, especially along key routes that serve areas of high population density. The Bike and Pedestrian Plan was adopted by the City Council

in March 2023 after eighteen months of planning and public engagement.

"The City's vision is that walking and biking are comfortable modes of transportation that connect people of all ages and abilities to one another and to everyday destinations via safe, accessible infrastructure," Peterson said. "We have more work to do in bridging gaps, but we will continue to find opportunities to expand and connect our network in the future."



SCAN HERE
Parks & Recreation
Information

KINNI CORRIDOR & USACE STUDY



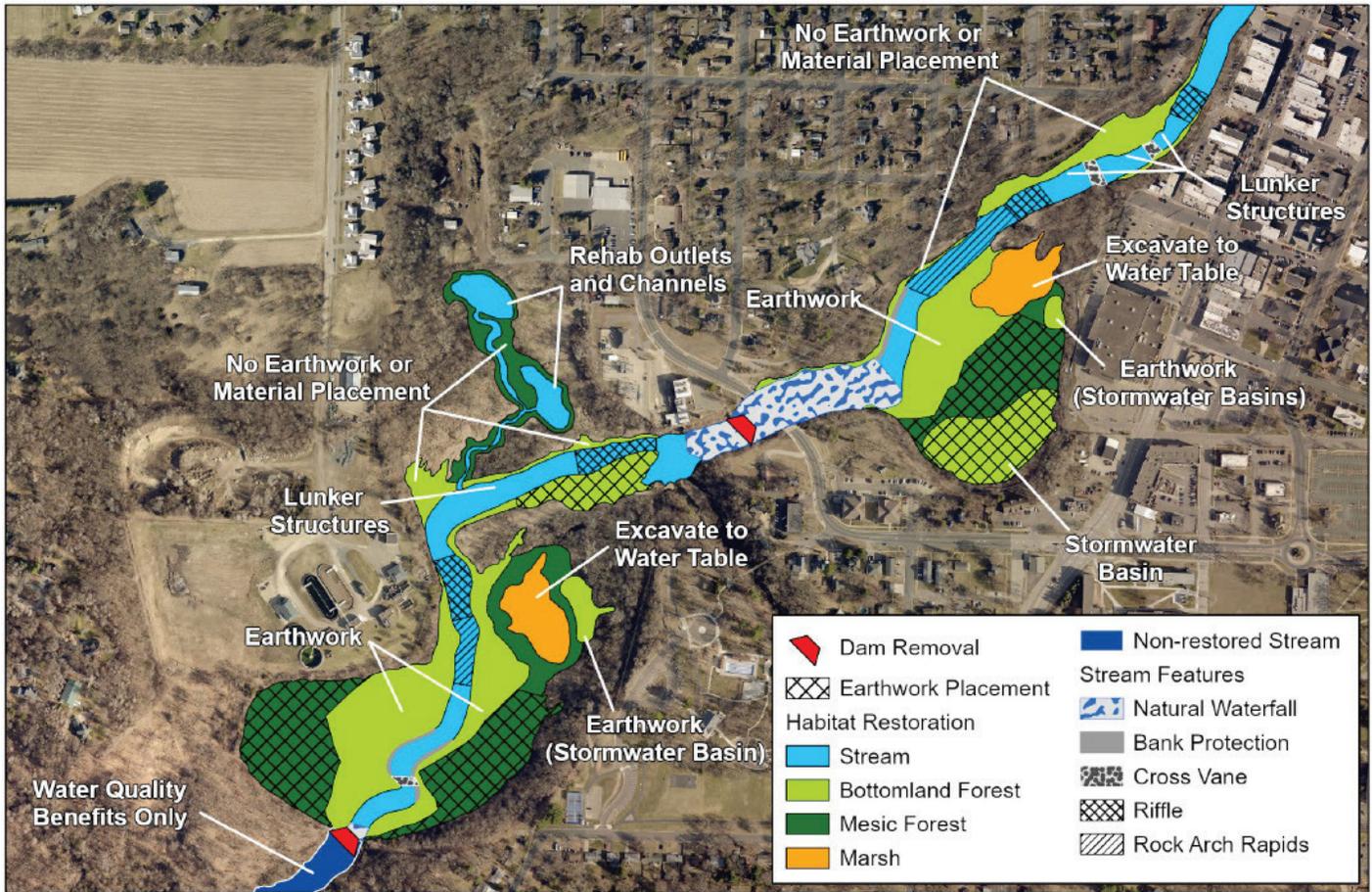
In November 2023, after eight months of initial analysis, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) presented a tentatively selected plan for the restoration of the Kinnickinnic River to the River Falls City Council. The USACE examined seven possible courses of action, ultimately recommending the removal of both Powell Falls and Junction Falls dams.

An important milestone occurred in the journey toward dam removal in 2018, when the River Falls City Council passed a resolution directing the removal of both dams to restore a free-flowing Kinnickinnic River: Powell Falls by 2026 and Junction Falls between 2035-2040. The Council's resolution was followed by the adoption of the Kinni Corridor Plan in January 2019.

"Public input during the plan's development reflected a strong community desire for improved conditions for wildlife, more trails, and enhanced opportunities for fishing, paddling, birding, biking, and hiking along the Kinni," Amy Peterson, community development director, said. "Every action the City has taken since the adoption of the Kinni Corridor Plan has been dedicated to turning that into a reality."

Even after the Council's resolution to bring the public's vision to life, funding posed a significant obstacle to dam removal. When the USACE approached the City in 2022 about a river restoration grant opportunity through the federal CAP 206 program, a path forward materialized.

KINNICKINNIC CAP 206: TENTATIVELY SELECTED PLAN



USACE FEASIBILITY STUDY OBJECTIVES:

PRIMARY

- Restore natural thermal dynamics to support native cold-water species prior to impoundment.
- Increase riffles and pools to increase the use and availability of cold-water habitat species.

SECONDARY

- Increase riparian forest habitat.
- Increase emergent wetland habitat.

WHAT IS CAP 206?

Under the authority provided by Section 206 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may plan, design, and build projects to restore aquatic ecosystems for fish and wildlife. In short, CAP 206 allows the US-ACE to fund and manage river restoration projects on behalf of cities and counties.



The USACE and the City hosted an open house at the River Falls Public Library in August of 2023 to obtain public input on the potential river restoration project. Over 125 people were in attendance to learn more about the feasibility study. Ninety-six formal comments were received, of which 77% were for dam removal, 16% against, and 7% neutral. The overwhelming positive responses reaffirm the public's support of the project.



U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS PARTNERSHIP

On March 18, 2023, a feasibility cost share agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was executed. The agreement enabled the USACE to begin a feasibility study, as part of the CAP 206 program, to determine whether there is a federal interest in undertaking and funding a river restoration project on the Kinnickinnic River. Further, the USACE aimed to evaluate the costs and benefits of several distinct approaches to river restoration.

To complete its analysis, the USACE focused on the three primary habitat types within the corridor: cold-water stream, riparian forest, and shallow and deep marsh. Using ecological modeling, the agency analyzed the needs of a native species in each of the three habitat types over a span of 50 years.

According to the USACE's findings, the tentatively selected plan to remove both dams will provide approximately 13 acres of cold-water stream restoration, 30 acres of riparian forest restoration, three acres of emergent wetland restoration, and help promote water quality benefits for the Lower Kinnickinnic.

By supporting a cold-water stream, increasing instream habitat, as well as forest and wetland habitat we can increase diversity of species and expand native wildlife, reduce invasive species, improve stormwater runoff and create additional recreation opportunities in the corridor.

“Because the USACE’s tentatively selected plan to remove both dams exceeds the maximum federal expenditure limit of \$10 million, the agency is in the process of submitting waiver approvals. The City and USACE expect to receive a determination in summer 2024, at which time the feasibility report will be finalized and presented for public review.”

- Amy Peterson,
Community Development Director

Ecological Modeling - Habitat Suitability Index

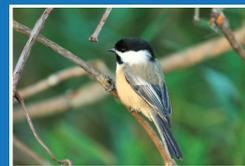
Model: Brown Trout

Habitat: Cold-water trout stream



Model: Black-Capped Chickadee and Veery

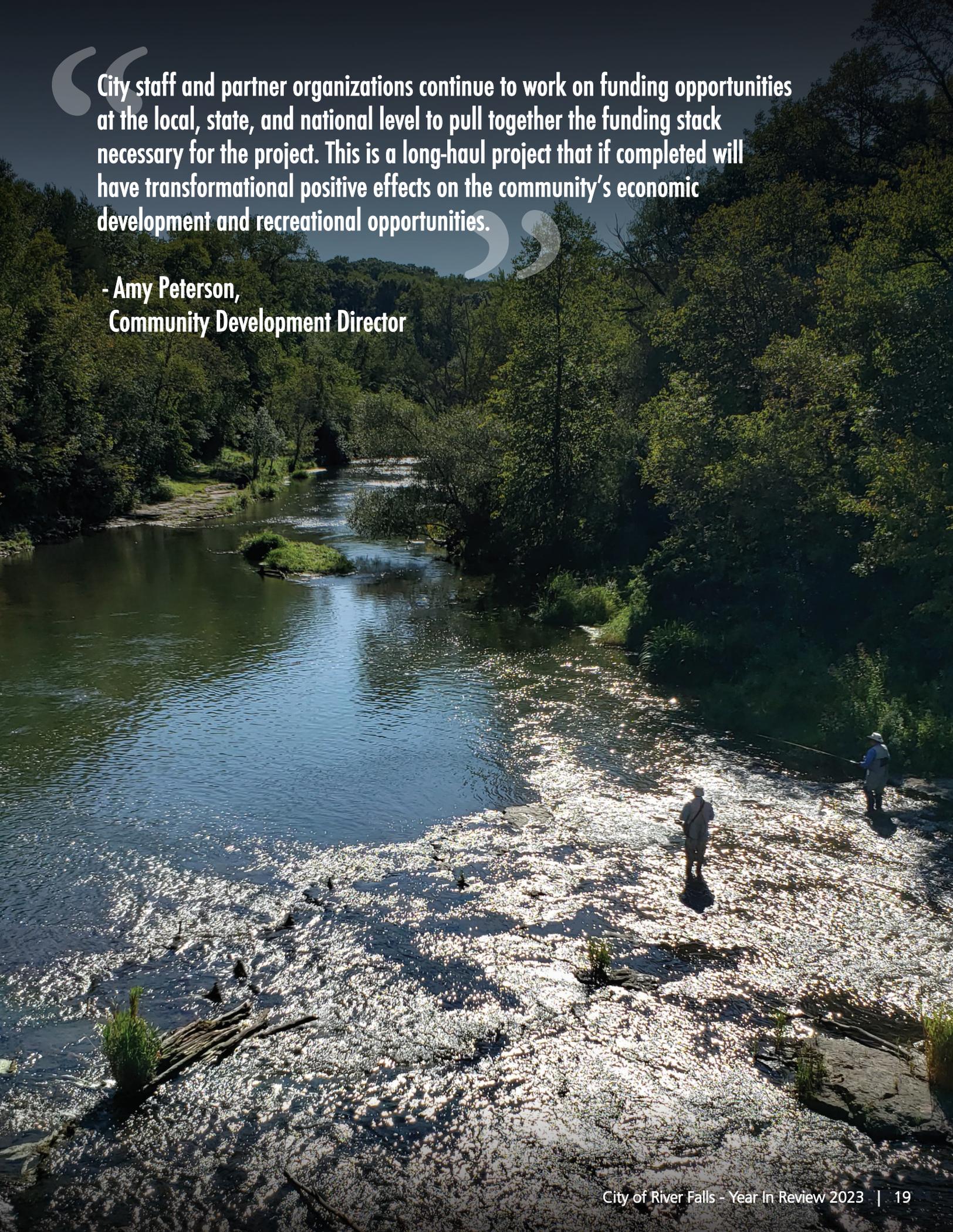
Habitat: Riparian forest



Model: Marsh Wren

Habitat: Shallow and deep marsh





City staff and partner organizations continue to work on funding opportunities at the local, state, and national level to pull together the funding stack necessary for the project. This is a long-haul project that if completed will have transformational positive effects on the community's economic development and recreational opportunities.

- Amy Peterson,
Community Development Director

NORTH WATER TOWER

As drivers head into town on Highway 35, a new sight greets them on the city's horizon: a 150-foot-tall water tower rising above the trees in Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park.

Unveiled in fall 2023, the tower represents the culmination of over ten years of strategic planning to meet the demands of a steadily growing population.

"As development has continued on the city's north side, we've known that we would eventually need an additional water tower to serve the needs of our residential and commercial utility customers," Kevin Westhuis, utility director, said. "As the City prepared to begin construction on Mann Valley Corporate Park, the timing was right to bring the tower to life."

Sitting atop a 63-foot concrete base, the tower holds 500,000 gallons of water. "To put that in perspective, a toilet uses about a gallon per flush," Dean Seemuth, water/wastewater superintendent, said. "This is a lot of water we're talking about."

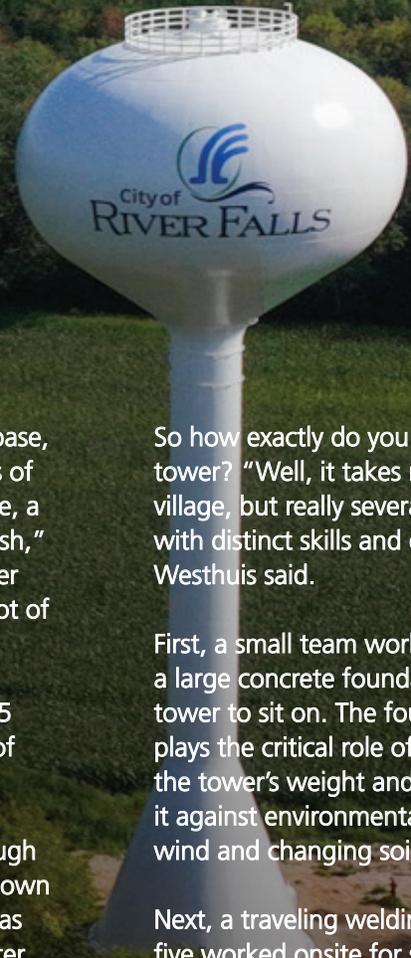
The water tower creates 115-125 pounds per square inch, or PSI, of water pressure. "Water pressure is created by gravity," Seemuth explained. "We didn't have enough storage capacity in that area of town to create the gravity flow that was needed to produce the right water pressures for a growing number of households and businesses."

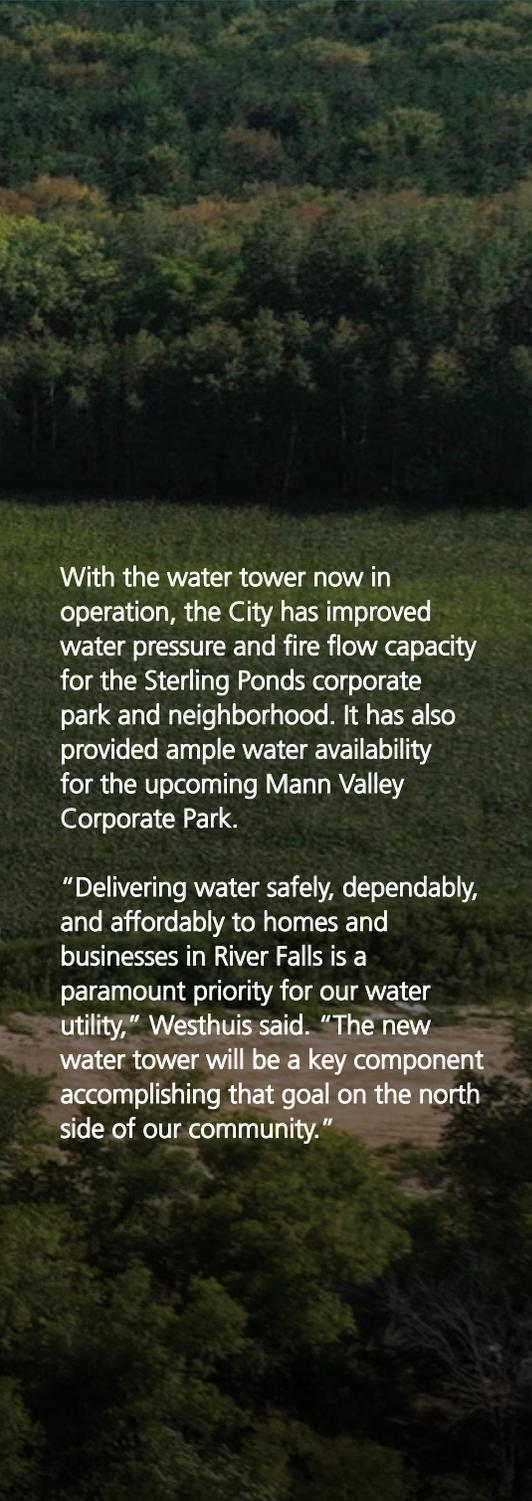
Previously, water for the area was stored in a tank atop the Mound Reservoir, which sits directly on the ground. As a result, pressures in the area were often lower than was optimal.

So how exactly do you build a water tower? "Well, it takes not just a village, but really several villages with distinct skills and expertise," Westhuis said.

First, a small team worked to install a large concrete foundation for the tower to sit on. The foundation plays the critical role of supporting the tower's weight and stabilizing it against environmental forces like wind and changing soil condition.

Next, a traveling welding crew of five worked onsite for seven weeks to build the tower. Once the tower was assembled, a third team arrived to sandblast and paint it, and finally, City utility staff worked to connect the tower to the City's water system with the construction of a massive utility extension, which included 3,800 feet of water main and 3,400 of sanitary sewer main.





With the water tower now in operation, the City has improved water pressure and fire flow capacity for the Sterling Ponds corporate park and neighborhood. It has also provided ample water availability for the upcoming Mann Valley Corporate Park.

“Delivering water safely, dependably, and affordably to homes and businesses in River Falls is a paramount priority for our water utility,” Westhuis said. “The new water tower will be a key component accomplishing that goal on the north side of our community.”



POWELL AVENUE BRIDGE

On Thursday, Nov. 30, the City of River Falls, in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), completed the Powell Avenue Bridge rehabilitation project.

Formerly known as County Highway MM, the road and bridge were maintained by St. Croix County until 2019, when the City assumed jurisdiction and renamed the road Powell Avenue. The age of the bridge necessitated significant repairs to ensure safe use by drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

The project, which began on Aug. 14, included replacement of the existing concrete bridge deck, or surface of the bridge. Constructed in 1973, the deck had deteriorated, causing the bridge’s weight limit to be reduced to just 10 tons.

The reconstruction of Powell Avenue Bridge was primarily funded by a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), which totaled approximately \$1 million. As part of the grant terms, WisDOT managed the rehabilitation project, including overseeing the bidding process and contractor selection. City engineering staff worked closely with WisDOT to monitor progress.

“The grant from WisDOT allowed us to make vital improvements to the bridge with minimal impact to taxpayers,” Todd Nickleski, city engineer, said. “A project like this comes with a big price tag, and having much of that financial burden lifted was transformative.”

Even with funding secured, other obstacles materialized. No work was allowed between Jan. 15 and July 30, 2023, due to a bald eagle’s nest found within 660 feet of the project. Tree removals were required to be completed prior to April 1, due to the potential presence of the northern long-eared bat. Finally, no in-river work was permitted after Sept. 15 to protect spawning fish.

Despite the hurdles, the rehabilitation project was completed, and the bridge reopened, in just over four months.

“Powell Avenue Bridge is a critical component of our transportation infrastructure in River Falls,” Nickleski said. “Between the scale of the work to be done and the restrictions to protect our natural environment, we are very grateful to WisDOT for bringing this project to completion so expertly and expediently.”

COMMUNITY — CONNECTIONS



MAYOR'S COOKOUT CONVERSATIONS

Mayor Dan Toland and River Falls City Councilmembers again hosted the Mayor's Cookouts in neighborhoods throughout the city.

COMMUNITY APPRECIATION Instagram

The City held its annual customer appreciation picnic for residents and utility customers.

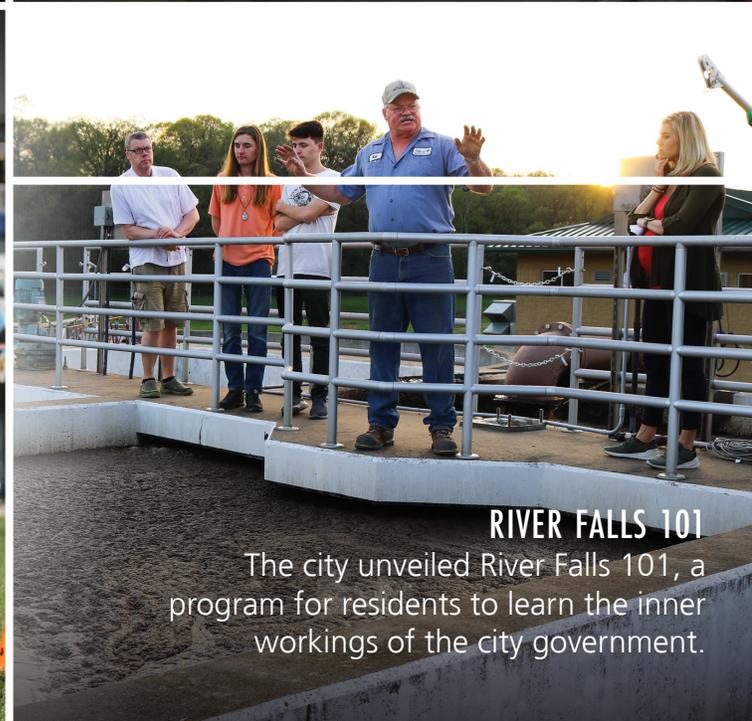


FIRE DEPARTMENT OPEN HOUSE

The fire department opened its doors to the community and spread the word about fire safety through fun, games, and live demos.

RUN WITH THE COPS

The police department partnered with area agencies to co-host Run with the Cops, at UW-River Falls.



RIVER FALLS 101

The city unveiled River Falls 101, a program for residents to learn the inner workings of the city government.

CONNECT WITH US



Pay Your Bill



Join Our Team



Agenda & Minutes



Forms & Permits



Elections



Municipal Code

RIVER FALLS READER

The River Falls Reader, the City's virtual newsletter, hits subscriber inboxes every two months. From in-depth looks at City programs and initiatives to development and infrastructure news, the River Falls Reader will keep you in the loop. Scan the QR code to subscribe.



CITY WEBSITE

You can find financial plans, the biennial budget, financial audit reports, checks issued, minutes from Council, board, and commission meetings, and more on the City's website.



YOUTUBE

Are you wondering what goes on when the City Council meets? Every Council meeting is live-streamed on YouTube and available to watch later at your convenience.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Did you know that the City of River Falls is on Facebook and Instagram? Follow us for news and behind-the-scenes glimpses at City Hall, Public Works, the Police and Fire departments, and the Library.



COMMUNITY APPRECIATION PICNIC

City Hall Plaza (222 Lewis St.)

Thursday, Aug. 8, 2024
4-6 p.m.

*** ECRWSS ***

Residential Customer




YEAR IN REVIEW
2023

In August 2023, the City of River Falls installed intersection improvements at Main Street and Division Street, including new bike crossing lanes and bike boxes, high visibility bollards, updated crosswalk buttons, and an asphalt art piece designed by local artist and University of Wisconsin-River Falls alumni Moz Rude. The project was funded by a \$10,000 AARP Community Challenge Grant.