



RIVER FALLS CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP REGARDING 2021-2022 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES UPDATES

February 8, 2022, 5 p.m., Training Room, City Hall

City Council Members Present: Mayor Dan Toland, Todd Bjerstedt, Nick Carow, Sean Downing, Scott Morrissette, Alyssa Mueller, Diane Odeen (virtual), Ben Plunkett

Members Absent: None

City Staff Present: City Administrator Scot Simpson; Assistant City Administrator Jason Stroud; Utility Director Kevin Westhuis; Community Development Director Amy Peterson; City Clerk Amy White; Senior Accountant Sam Hosszu; Management Analyst Fellow Kathryn Paquet; City Engineer Todd Nickleski; Assistant to the City Administrator Jennifer Smith; IT Specialist Jon Smits

Others: None

The Mayor called the workshop to order at 5:01 p.m. City Administrator Simpson provided a brief introduction on the agenda. He introduced Jennifer Smith, Assistant to the City Administrator, who was leading the workshop.

Smith thanked everyone for attending. She explained the handouts that Council received. The agenda will focus on the progress that was made on the priorities that were adopted on February 23, 2021. Smith provided legislative resource information. The League of Municipalities have two attorneys on staff and provided contact information. She also shared information on a legislative tracking tool. Smith talked about the budget process in Wisconsin.

Smith said advances were seen in all three priorities:

- Improvements to emergency detention process
- Multi modal transportation long term funding solution
- Covid 19 relief assistance

Improvements to the emergency detention process are access, support, telehealth, substance abuse, Badgercare expansion, crisis resources. Funding is \$150 million.

In 2021, total GTA funding for cities, villages, and towns was \$383,000,532. It was increased two percent in both 2022 and 2023. By 2023, it will be \$398,996,800. Cities and most villages receive their GTA payments under the shared cost formula. Smith talked about how the funding was distributed.

Smith said the City expects to receive \$1.6 million in ARPA funding. ARPA funding has now been expanded to include capital projects if they are related to the public health emergency or economic impacts associated with the pandemic. She talked about the eligible expenses.

There were no notable changes or advances made in legislative technical corrections or state agency language changes.

Smith said significant advances were made in the areas recognized by the Council's funding priorities. Of the four priorities, three have experienced positive momentum with West Central Biosolids facility improvements having failed to move forward due to Congress passing a continuing resolution instead of an actual 2022 budget. That resulted in \$1.6 million of federal funding potentially being lost.

For the Kinni Corridor project, the City was awarded \$350,000 for the feasibility study which has been completed. As a result of assembly bill 8905, the past limitations for dam safety projects created in the 2021-2023 biennial budget would

not apply to dam removal. Smith noted that today the bill passed and was amended to include language that excludes dam removal from dam safety projects limitations and no longer requires a matching grant. The bill will move to the senate. It is likely to be tabled for consideration for the amendments. It is expected to be signed by the governor. The City may be expected to send letters of support.

For the Powell Avenue Bridge project, the City applied for Wisconsin DOT local bridge program funding in August 2021 for an 80 percent match of construction costs. Smith provided timeline information.

The state has granted \$111 million in capital funds for the UWRF Science and Technology Innovation Center which brings the project closer to the funding goal of roughly \$116 million.

Smith moved onto future priorities and some things the City is watching. Areas of interest could include a package of law enforcement bills introduced in January. These bills are brought to Council's attention by Chief Young. They address officer retention, reimbursing law enforcement education, part time academy programs, developing curriculum, teaching K-12 students about how to interact with law enforcement and honoring law enforcement officers with law enforcement appreciation month. Smith talked about factors influencing the bills which include Wisconsin experiencing the lowest number of law enforcement officers in the workforce in the last 10 years with retirements, resignations, and diminished interest in the profession having contributed.

In the area of Community and Economic Development, senate bill 518 has been sent to the governor for signature. This bill modifies the definition of environmental pollution under environmental remediation tasks in tax incremental districts which allows communities to revitalize contaminated properties. Smith showed other bills of interest to the City. She concluded her presentation and stood for questions.

Aldersperson Morrisette asked Smith to email links from earlier in the program. Aldersperson Plunkett asked which bills Smith thought were the most relevant. Smith said the law enforcement bill was much larger than she showed, Chief Young was supportive of the ones she featured.

Aldersperson Downing talked about increasing state shared revenue back to the 2007 level saying it would bring down property taxes and people would like that. He also talked about modernizing the open meetings law so people could participate from home if they have a public comment. There was discussion between Plunkett and Downing about Downing's proposals.

Simpson said staff assumes the items of interest for Council would remain of interest to Council. He said the primary focus until October would be on how to access federal resources (infrastructure and build back better bills). He talked about being inundated with information. Simpson spoke about staff planning on how to access eligible funding. He talked about the state meeting schedule and the good revenue projection. Simpson talked about the 2023-2025 budget cycle having more opportunities for negotiations.

Simpson talked about some affordable housing stuff coming out, but he is a skeptic. He questions whether they are looking for affordable housing or deregulation. He hasn't seen a broad group of people gather and talk about legislative changes. Simpson spoke further about builders, tax credits, and development.

Simpson asked Aldersperson Odeen if she had anything. Odeen said no but agreed that there wouldn't be a lot of movement in Madison this year.

Aldersperson Mueller asked about the bills and when they would be acted on. Simpson said there are likely to be acted on but doesn't know the governor's plan. He spoke further about the bills Chief Young recommended including which ones would be the most interest to the City. Simpson said if there are any objections, it would be good to bring it now.

Mueller has an objection to AB831 and ASB830. She feels they will be extremely political - in not a helpful way - to endorse them. She agrees with Simpson AB832 and AB836 would be helpful in recruitment and retention. Odeen agreed. Smith said retention and recruitment was what Chief Young was primarily concerned with.

Mueller expressed concern about the last line of bill 831. She explained her concern further about recruiting in Minneapolis. Simpson shared his understanding of the bill. He said the City is willing to consider that strategy. We're not above going to find the best people we can for our spots.

Plunkett asked if that would be Minneapolis. Simpson thinks there is an opportunity to find good people all over the place. We would use our process to find out if they are good. Simpson spoke further about the City's recruitment process. Mueller was concerned that we would go specially to places where there have been community concerns about the police. There was further discussion about recruitment.

Odeen wanted to know more about assembly bill 830 and what's required in this model curriculum and what does the school board think of it. Simpson's advice is that it is not in our wheelhouse. Unless we think we are getting a huge return for the police in the City, we wouldn't get too involved in it. What he is hearing is that the Council wants to help support our recruitment and retention efforts for law enforcement. Simpson asked if there were other topics on people's minds.

Morrisette asked what we gain with regard for the emergency health detention stuff. Are we still driving to Oshkosh? What did we get there? Simpson isn't prepared to answer specifically as the Police Chief wasn't present so he will have to follow up. Simpson provided a general answer and talked about the bed count increasing in Eau Claire, the bed tracker tool, a new arrangement regarding transportation, and veterans' beds. We have made progress but are far from implementing.

Assistant City Administrator Stroud provided clarification saying funding would be going to beds in Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls. The funding will be released in October so there isn't a plan yet. There was a discussion about costs. Morrisette said so what he is hearing is that it should remain on the priority list.

Mueller asked if the police officer makes the determination to transport for a mental health crisis. Simpson said in Wisconsin, police powers are used, and the officer has to make the determination. Simpson talked about the differences between Wisconsin and Minnesota. Stroud clarified the scenario was only for those individuals who were resistant or incapable of making the decision for themselves. There was further discussion and clarification about mental health emergencies.

Plunkett said there are issues with our shared ride taxi service as far as availability and asked if there are other solutions on the legislative level or is this something we are going to have to solve. Simpson said some of the legislative options he can think of is mandating it's a state supplied service – essentially saying it's not a city service. If it was a state service, the county would be the provider. He thinks there is zero chance the state will make the counties take this over. Simpson talked about transportation authorities and legislation being helpful. He talked about asking the state more for funding. There was discussion about the shared ride expenses. Stroud said there was an analyst conducting a taxi rate study and a feasibility review. He said a lot of the federal stimulus programs do have some transit related funding. There was further discussion.

Plunkett spoke about the antiquated dispatch system. Simpson talked about a scenario of the state having a statewide dispatch system and giving it away for free. More reimbursement might be a fix but that's not a sure thing either. Plunkett said it's hard to compete with a \$1 per ride and those residents cannot afford a higher rate. He talked about designing the City to be more functional without having to drive downtown. There was further discussion.

Simpson thanked the Council for their time. The workshop ended at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk