



RIVER FALLS CITY COUNCIL JOINT WORKSHOP WITH THE RIVER FALLS BOARD OF EDUCATION

August 8, 2023, 5 p.m., Training Room, City Hall

City Council Members Present: Dan Toland, Jeff Bjork, Nick Carow, Sean Downing, Scott Morrisette, Alyssa Mueller, Diane Odeen

Members Absent: Todd Bjerstedt

City Staff Present: City Administrator Scot Simpson; IT Specialist Jon Smits; Management Analyst Fellow Sara Kasel; Finance Director Josh Solinger; Utility Director Kevin Westhuis; Community Development Director Amy Peterson; Police Chief Gordon Young; Public Works Manager Erica Ellefson; Library Director Tanya Misselt; City Engineer Todd Nickleski; Assistant Director of Community Development Emily Shively; Assistant to the City Administrator Jennifer Smith

School Board Members/Staff: Superintendent Jamie Benson; President Stacy Johnson Myers; Vice President Cindy Halbrook; Clerk Alan Tuchtenhagen; Treasurer Mike Miller, Director of Finance and Facilities Lynette Edwards; Administrative Assistant Amanda Taylor

Members Absent: Bob Casey, Lindsay Curtis

Others: Ben Fochs, Rebecca Ferguson, Michael Metro, others

At 5:01 p.m., the workshop was called to order by Mayor Toland. The workshop began with introductions.

City Administrator Scot Simpson began with City updates. He talked about housing trends – 770 housing units are approved or under construction since 2021-July 2023. Housing supply remains critically low. Simpson talked about housing being an ecosystem. Housing types compliment each other. He talked about growth in the city.

Simpson continued talking about the Mann Valley Corporate Park. He showed a map of the area. He spoke about the recently approved construction contracts, acquisition of property from Gary Moelter, development highlights, and infrastructure. He talked about pathways.

Simpson continued talking about the Kinni Corridor Project and working with US Army Corps Engineers and an upcoming Open House.

Simpson spoke about development highlights and a State Budget Update. He talked about supplemental shared revenue, personal property exemption, and innovation grants. He fielded questions.

Superintendent Jamie Benson talked about referendum plan items and the related community survey. This would be for operational referendum support. The district has done a comprehensive facilities study. There is a survey being put together for community which will go out in September. There's one referendum question related to operational question. Benson said the school district doesn't have the financial means to keep pace with inflation. He explained the cause of this is the school funding formula which was created in 1993. He provided an example in how it works. He talked about the amount of money school districts receive per pupil and state budget cycles. Benson spoke about the deficit they will face in the upcoming years. There was discussion about how the school and city get their money – the differences between revenue and levy caps.

Benson talked about the referendum question asking for \$1 million in year one, \$2 million in year two, \$3 million in year three, and then plateauing. The district is going to try and take a reasonable and modest approach. Benson talked about enrollment. Modest growth is anticipated. The three largest classes are sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The district is graduating more out and not bringing more in. Benson talked about the demographer providing numbers. He talked about the new housing not bringing in kids. The yield rate is 0.172 per unit for multifamily units. With all the apartments going up, school staff assumes there should be a boom in students but that is not the case. There was a discussion about 'where are the kids'.

Benson continued talking about the school forest. He talked about a new access road, acreage, and volunteers. The district received a \$18,000 grant from Pierce County. The district intends to use it to improve access to all. He talked about city staff being helpful and gave a shout out to Mike Noreen for helping them out with the school forest project. The city has been generous to put students into the old police station. Benson believes that he and Simpson have a good relationship. They communicate often. He talked about collaboration and the good use of tax dollars. Benson is proud of the city. City staff runs a good show. He noted the park and rec programs and the beauty of the city and all it has to offer won't happen without City leadership. He recognized and appreciated it.

President Myers Johnson thanked the City for the student liaison officer. It is an important collaboration. She talked about how they make life better for kids and families. Clerk Tuchtenhagen talked about how the officers are always at graduation and how they have built relations. He appreciates the collaboration.

Simpson talked about the expectation from Council is collaboration. There will be challenges over time. He talked specifically about youth sports and the use of facilities.

At the end of the scheduled presentations, there was discussion. Alderperson Mueller talked about the expense of raising children and childcare. She said there are no affordable or adequate childcare. She doesn't believe the school district should be a babysitter. She asked if that was something we can collaborate on? Benson didn't know but said he and Simpson could discuss it. There was further conversation about it.

Alderperson Morrissette brought up a concern from someone who lives by the high school. He talked about experiencing frustration with high school students parking in neighborhoods and speeding. He asked how the problem could be fixed. He would like to solve it both short and long term. Benson affirmed that this was a real problem and spoke further. Morrissette thought we owe it to the taxpayers to figure this out. Alderperson Bjork asked about students riding the buses. Benson talked in detail about the number of bus routes they run. There was continued discussion about parking.

Tuchtenhagen talked about the joint meeting not being common. He feels it is an indication of good government. It's unique.

The workshop adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk