



**CITY OF RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN
COMMON COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS**

April 12, 2022

Mayor Dan Toland called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers at City Hall.

City Council Members Present: Todd Bjerstedt, Nick Carow, Sean Downing, Scott Morrissette, Alyssa Mueller, Diane Odeen, Ben Plunkett

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Administrator Scot Simpson; City Attorney Chris Gierhart; IT Specialist Jon Smits, IT Specialist Sterling Hackney; Utility Director Kevin Westhuis; Sergeant Logan Dohmeier; Finance Director Josh Solinger; Senior Accountant Sam Hosszu; Assistant City Administrator Jason Stroud; City Engineer Todd Nickleski; Public Works Director Mike Stifter

Others Present: none

The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Approval of Minutes – March 22, 2022, Regular and Closed Session Minutes

MSC Morrissette/Bjerstedt move to approve minutes. Unanimous.

APPROVAL OF BILLS:

Bills: \$2,583,717.77 (Mueller)

MSC Mueller/Bjerstedt to approve bills. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT, PETITIONS, REQUESTS AND COMMUNICATIONS:

Aldersperson Downing thanked the City for the field trip to the Wisconsin Dells to tour their Class A biosolids plant. He said detailed questions were asked, and it confirmed workshop discussions. Building our own plant would save a lot of money and is more efficient with use of technology. A Class A biosolids plant takes away any stress that comes with a Class B biosolids plant and having a continuing relationship with one. Downing talked about the product being dry and almost odor free. He was impressed with it being remarkably clean. He only has positive things to say about the project saying it also opens up space for Public Works.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Resolution No. 6663 - Approving City Prosecutor Services

Resolution No. 6664 -Referring the Annexation Petition for the Thompson Property to the Plan Commission

Resolution No. 6665 -Approving Purchase of 2022 John Deere Tractor

Resolution No. 6666 - Approving Purchase of 2022 John Deere Tractor Backhoe

MSC Odeen/ Morrissette move to approve the Consent Agenda. Unanimous.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution No 6667 - Approving American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Plan

MS Morrissette/Bjerstedt move to approve resolution. The Mayor asked for comments.

Aldersperson Downing recommended use of transportation utility fee because it saves money, it's fiscally responsible and brings down the cost while prioritizing our city's transportation needs in a fair and responsible

manner. A transportation utility fee keeps life affordable. It is Downing's opinion that it is the best modern planning tool available to cities at the moment.

Downing said someone at the State of the City said most of the homeowners saw a property tax reduction and asked City Administrator Simpson what he attributed that to. His response was we did that by having a levy where the total amount of spending was in line with new growth. That is how we were able to balance the city's needs.

Downing's answer to maintaining responsible growth and doing that in the future and having improvements for transportation is to create a transportation utility fee. It is specifically designed to save money through dynamic planning and direction implementation where we responsibly phase in our transportation needs with responsibly structured fees which reduces taxes. This brings down overall taxes and spending in the most responsible way.

Also, Downing wanted to Council to consider leaving some funds available for a potential ice rink saying there was a community need. He understood the difficulty of getting to that saying said we should also give our community chances to find partners first whether it's banks, groups, state grants to bring in that money. He knows he is asking for a need that is prioritized in a manner where we would have done it a long time ago, but we didn't have the funds. It's been 10 years of waiting to get an ice rink for the community for ice skating. He is not suggesting that we spend all of the ARPA money as far as the total cost would be. He thinks we should do the due diligence and raise it through the community first. If we can't get those funds, we fill in the rest with ARPA. He doesn't think waiting five years is acceptable but thinks we could do it in two. Downing thinks it makes a lot of sense.

Motion by Downing to move to set appropriate ARPA funds aside to include a future skating rink in Glen Park including the Glen Park Design Plan in two years instead of five. Alderperson Plunkett asked what the dollar amount would be and what line is Downing taking it from.

Downing said the dollar amount is \$50,000 but wasn't sure what the warming house cost would be. He asked City Administrator Simpson to provide information. Simpson said he wasn't able to provide accurate information on the cost of a warming house because staff hasn't done significant research on that. Simpson said staff did quick research for Downing on the cost of a bare bones rink which would be \$50,000-\$60,000. Simpson said that wouldn't include any dashboards, maintenance or upkeep. No analysis was done on operating costs. Downing thinks additional things could be done by the community but thinks it would be wise to have ARPA funds to balance it.

The Mayor said we are in the middle of doing a Comp Plan. Park and Rec is part of that. He thinks that is where it should be. If Park and Rec likes the idea, it can be carried forward to the Comp Plan. We need to figure out what they are going to do first before we do stuff like this. Downing asked if money could be put aside through ARPA and let the Park Board figure out if that is acceptable.

Second by Carow on Downing's motion. The Mayor asked for discussion.

Alderperson Odeen said one of the things the use of ARPA money will do is free money going forward. She thinks the ice rink merits longer discussion, more detailed plans perhaps an outreach plan. It has been discussed for a while, but she doesn't see it necessarily connected to ARPA, but ARPA might make what Downing wants possible. Odeen will not be voting in favor of Downing's amendment because we don't have enough in terms of the amount of money, and it would upset what she sees as a good balance that we have in the plan in front of us.

Alderperson Morrisette has been an ardent supporter of a warming house and skating rink at Glen Park since the City did the park plan. He would like to see it done but agrees with Odeen. He thinks we have the comp plan, the park and pedestrian plan. He thinks in that plan, they will give us the time to flesh that out. As Odeen pointed out, the ARPA funds will allow us some spending ability and down the road those two will intersect. Morrisette would prefer to see us not carve out ARPA funds. He feels a pot of money in search of a project is a bad fiscal policy. This sounds a little like this. He supports the long-term goal of getting a skating rink. The

Rotary looked at it and thought about it as one of their major projects. He talked about the possible cost of a warming house being \$240,000 a couple of years ago. What he would like to see us do is get it in the park and ped plan and put focus on it there.

Plunkett asked Downing if his intent was to ensure that this actually gets done unlike the promises of action that have not materialized for a significant period of time. Downing said yes, it has been ten years that we have not had a skating rink. Ten years is too long – waiting another five, you will have an upset community not being able to use an underutilized park in the winter. The ARPA funds are given to us so we can have amenities that are tangible. This is a tangible amenity for the community that they get to enjoy.

Plunkett asked City Administrator Simpson if there was a portion of the money earmarked for a warming house or ice rink, we would lose those if no action was taken to use those funds.

Simpson said staff would endeavor to make sure funds aren't lost but that is a possibility. How he understands the resolution to be constructed is he is trying to make sure there is clear communication. You are giving the City Administrator the authority to spend ARPA money. We are trying to avoid any confusion about what the direction of the Council is. Simpson explained Council could modify the resolution with an amendment which would give him the understanding to set aside some money to trigger priorities or the Council could just set the amount. He provided an example. Simpson would want to know about the ice rink because is it not a recommendation from staff but it the prerogative of the Council to do that. He asked Council to identify an amount and said if an amount is set, we will be watching the federal clock, so we don't lose the ARPA dollars.

Plunkett's understanding was that Downing's amendment would direct the City to do things in the public interest with the ARPA funds.

The Mayor felt this needs to go through park and rec and the comp plan. Plunkett noted there is an amendment on the floor. The Mayor knew and was addressing it. He asked if anyone else had comments first.

Aldersperson Carow understood where Downing was coming from and felt 10 years was overdue. He talked about taking his kids to the UWRP rink to skate. He said it is a need as there isn't much available ice time. Carow thought a 2015 planning process had an ice rink on it and it was pulled. He talked about getting it out in front, saying if you're a community partner, we need to talk about things down the road. Carow gave examples of a gymnastics center and ballpark with naming rights. He talked about the prior ice rink being underutilized. He thinks there is a need and thinks more weight, momentum and drive toward having an ice rink in the future. Carow expressed appreciation of the city's planning process saying we do a good job working and funding the plan. He also appreciated Downing bringing it up for discussion. Carow loved \$188,000 for police vehicles but that's not something the community necessarily sees. He noted there is \$106,000 for park equipment and money for the public works facility. Carow thinks Council also needs to keep focused on public facing projects saying that's partly what congress asked us to do in terms of crafting out this legislation. He thanked everyone for the conversation.

The Mayor felt the money would be better spent on 2,000 Ash trees which need to be removed which wasn't planned for and will be \$200,000 a year. Some of the ARPA money would be great for that. The Mayor said the ice rink can wait until it goes through park and rec. We can find the money if the park and rec wants to do this. The Mayor said the transportation utility is in the court now so it would be a couple of years before that gets figured out if we can legally do that.

Downing said it was in court because they are asking if it can stack with other funding. We already have fees that do so it's not even a question. It's political posturing and will pass. Downing said there is a plan for the trees. The Mayor acknowledged there was a plan, but the money is unexpected for the city. He is making a suggestion. This is forward facing. This is something the city will see and appreciate. That's his opinion.

Simpson suggested he consider a friendly amendment to identify a dollar amount to help staff understand better what the scope of the project is.

A friendly amendment was made by Mueller/seconded by Downing asking the city to set aside \$100,000 for ice rink.

The Mayor asked for discussion. Morrisette asked where the money was being taken from. Mueller asked that the city staff make the decision because they know the needs better than Council does. Morrisette respectfully requested that Mueller pick one because that's putting the city staff in a position that they have to make a decision that should be made at the Council level.

Odeen said the city staff made a proposal and the Council discussed and gave its support to it, so she felt it was incumbent on the Council to give direction. The Mayor asked Mueller where she wanted it from. Mueller said she would not make that motion; if someone else would like to, they can. She felt the city staff could do it.

Downing said some of the money can be raised through community grants which means there will be money that we will most likely be saving. But it's not going to be 15 or 20 more years of not having an ice rink. That's unacceptable.

The Mayor asked for other comments. Carow said looking at Table 3 in the memo there are ten line items. If we are looking at \$100,000, we could kind of do the math there. He assumed the city came in with good estimates but thinks there is some wiggle there. He feels it is feasible but that's his thought. The Mayor asked if Carow meant it was feasible for staff to come up with \$100,000. Carow affirmed.

There was a request for a roll call vote. Simpson clarified that Council is voting on an amendment to the resolution in the packet to set aside \$100,000 of expenditure from the ARPA funds for an ice rink. By extension, it would give the City Administrator the authority to figure out where that comes from unless Council has further amendments.

The Mayor asked for a roll call vote. The vote passed 4-3 with Downing, Mueller, Carow, and Plunkett voting in favor and Odeen, Morrisette and Bjerstedt against. The Mayor asked for a vote on the original resolution. The resolution passed 6-1 with all voting in favor except for Morrisette.

Simpson reminded Council that they provided him the authority to make the prioritization and requested that Council don't make individual requests to the City Administrator on what things do not get cut from the list that it would be done by you as a group not as individuals.

REPORTS:

Administrator's Report

City Administrator Simpson provided updates and information.

MSC Bjerstedt/Morrisette move to adjourn at 7:02 p.m. Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk