



e-Source

November 2021

City of River Falls



Main Street looking merry and bright during the holiday season.

The mayor's message: giving thanks

I hope this newsletter finds everyone as healthy and happy as possible. It was a hot and dry summer here in River Falls. It was nice to be out and about again, even if it meant showering four times a day because of the heat and humidity. Personally, I would rather have the heat than what we all know is coming too



*Dan Toland, Mayor of the City of River Falls,
and wife Joni.*

soon.

We are right in the middle of late fall – the time of year where we can jump 20 degrees from one weekend to the next. This is the best time of the year, according to most people. Whether you love to get into the woods and hunt, go for a hike, do some four wheeling, fish, sit by the fire, or watch football, it's tough to beat the versatility this season offers.

With Thanksgiving coming, and the Christmas season soon to follow, I think we all tend to begin reflecting on the past year, what we have accomplished, and what we're thankful for. I think we can be hard on ourselves when we do that. We never feel like we've done enough; we get stuck on the unchecked boxes on our to-do lists. Just remember, we can't always accomplish everything we want to. And that's okay, because we need things to accomplish next year, too.

In the past, I'd always find myself in a dilemma while thinking about what I was thankful for. I'm just as thankful as everyone else for the big blessings in my life. I have my health, friends, family, and a wonderful wife that tolerates me. I have a loving, engaged, and supportive community, and a great country to live in. Then there's my job, my business, and the two dogs that love me unconditionally. We are all thankful for those sorts of things, especially since not everyone around us has them.

But then there are other things I'm thankful for – the things I used to feel guilty about. I'm thankful that Joni takes the dogs out before bed every night, especially with the bitter cold coming. I'm thankful that she lets me decide what we're going to watch on TV in the evening, even though I know she hates everything I like to watch. I'm thankful she brings the wood in during the day for our fireplace so I don't have to do it when I get home from work. I'm thankful that there are smart people around me with knowledge in areas that I don't have to help me fill in the gaps. I'm thankful that the team I support

goes to the playoffs every year, and has had a Hall of Fame quarterback for the last few decades. I'm thankful that I have somehow managed to bamboozle my kids into thinking I'm a good Dad, my grandkids that I'm a good PaPa, and Joni that I'm a good husband.

I know that I'm really lucky, but I don't feel guilty about being thankful for these blessings anymore. Neither should you. It's okay to feel thankful for everything - not just the things Christmas movies and greeting cards call to our attention.

Beyond family, friends, good health, and stable jobs, we can, and should, be thankful even for the things we may feel we don't deserve. Embrace the guilty thankfulness.

I wish you all a very happy and joyful holiday season.

GO Pack Go!

Dan Toland
Mayor, City of River Falls

We asked, you answered

Every two years since 2013, the City of River Falls has partnered with the National Research Center at Polco to administer its Community Survey. The goal of the survey is to measure public opinion on livability in River Falls.

In July 2021, **2,700 households** in the City were randomly selected to receive survey mailings. The survey was also made available online and publicized by the City for additional residents who wished to respond.

The City obtained a final survey sample of **557 residents**, with a response rate of **21%**. Staff is currently reviewing the results to identify service areas in need of further analysis. The results will also assist in setting budgeting priorities for the upcoming 2023-2024 budget process.

Thank you for providing your valuable input.



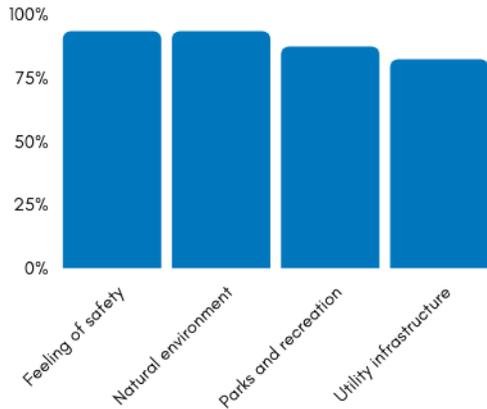
2021 COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Highlights



92%
of residents rate the City an excellent or good place to live

92%
are very or somewhat likely to recommend living in River Falls to others



What makes River Falls so livable?
At least 80% of residents rated these features of the City "excellent" or "good."



Customer service
Residents were asked to rate the City staff member they most recently encountered on the following qualities.

92% said knowledgeable **90%** said responsive **89%** said courteous

Opportunities for Growth

2 in 10 An illustration of a yellow taxi with a black checkered pattern on the side and a red light on top.

rate ease of travel by public transport "excellent" or "good"



2 in 10

rate shopping opportunities "excellent" or "good"

4 in 10

rate the availability of quality affordable housing "excellent" or "good"



Visit our website for more information:

<https://www.rfcity.org/558/Citizen-Surveys>

New additions

As the City of River Falls grows, so does our staff! The City will soon be kicking off the planning processes for its Comprehensive Plan, Bike and Pedestrian Plan, and Park and Recreation Plan, and Emily, Sam, and Kendra, the newest additions to the Community Development team, have arrived right on time. **Get to know them!**

Emily Shively, City Planner



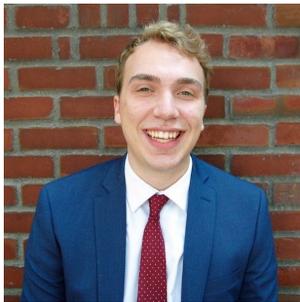
Emily Shively grew up in Carver County, Minnesota and holds both Master of Landscape Architecture and Master of Urban and Regional Planning degrees from the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. She joins the City River Falls from the City of Oakdale, Minnesota, where she worked as the City's Planner. While at Oakdale, Shively completed major projects including a small area plan for a 200-acre mixed residential subdivision with an interconnected park and open space system, station area plans for two bus rapid transit stations, and the update of the City's Comprehensive Plan. In her free time, Shively enjoys being outside -- whether hiking, camping, or gardening, she loves the feeling of being refreshed by nature in all seasons. As City Planner, Shively will help oversee the development of all three plans. "I am really excited to join the team at River Falls - this is a beautiful community with so many unique assets and amenities," Shively said. "I'm greatly looking forward to getting to know the community, and gaining their perspectives on our issues and opportunities as we work to ensure the City's vitality through the Comprehensive Plan and the two companion plans."

Kendra Ellner, Planner

Kendra Ellner grew up in Scottsdale, Arizona, attending Arizona State University for both her bachelor's and master's degrees. She comes to River Falls from the City of Apache Junction, Arizona, where she worked as a planning intern while completing her graduate degree. Having graduated in May 2021, Ellner is thrilled to be beginning her career with the City. In her free time, Ellner enjoys cooking, listening to music, and painting. In addition to assisting the rest of the Community Development team with the comprehensive planning process, Ellner will also focus much of her time on the completion of the Park and Recreation Plan. "Outdoor recreation is a really important part of people's everyday lives in River Falls, as it should be, because the natural environment we have is stunning and offers so many opportunities for outdoor activities," Ellner said. "I'm looking forward to engaging with our community members to collaboratively shape the future they want to see for our park and recreation system."



Sam Burns, Planner



Sam Burns was raised in Apple Valley, Minnesota and comes to River Falls from the City of Cottage Grove, Minnesota, where he worked as a planning intern. Burns attended the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities with a major in Urban Studies, graduating with his bachelor's degree in 2019. In his free time, Burns enjoys hiking with his girlfriend Cassidy and their dog Harvey, trying new breweries, and running. Burns will assist in the overall comprehensive planning process and will also play a large role in the development of the City's Bike and Pedestrian Plan. "The Bike and Pedestrian Plan is unique from the comprehensive plan in that it will provide in-depth recommendations for making the city's sidewalk and trail network more accessible, safe, and extensive," Burns said. "The community engagement element of the process is something I'm passionate about -- it's important that we work to ensure that it's an inclusive process where many different voices are heard so we can create a plan that serves all individuals who walk and bike in the city."



A winning public art proposal



A rendering of Bonnie Rubenstein's upcoming public art piece "Art is Power," which will be installed at the City's electric substation on South Winter Street.

River Falls artist Bonnie Rubenstein has been selected to create a site-specific work to complement the City's recently updated electric substation on South Winter Street.

Rubenstein's design, "Art Is Power," was chosen from five impressive proposals reviewed by a selection panel consisting of Mayor Dan Toland, City staff, and community members. Funding for the project comes from the City's new public art funding program, "River Falls Creates", which dedicates up to 1% of the budget of major infrastructure projects to the commission and installation of public art throughout the city.

"Art is Power" was selected for its visually appealing design, use of sustainable materials, suitability to the site, and thematic tie to the City's identity. The piece depicts a series of blue and aqua water elements, constructed of heavy duty aluminum, mounted across the brick walls surrounding the substation, which will be painted white to enable the colors to stand out. The offset angle of the two walls will help create the unmistakable image of a dynamic, flowing river, representing the Kinnikinnic -- which has served as a source of electrical power in the city for many years and remains its most magnificent natural asset.

"I wanted to honor the past and the present in the art piece, and flowing water presented in a unique medium of burnished and colored metal elements felt fitting," Rubenstein said. "The long narrow space on the walls designated for the art was a perfect palette for the flowing river I visualized there. I hope that the piece brings beauty to the space while celebrating both the significance of the substation and the city's history."



Artist Bonnie Rubenstein at work on a glass sculpture in her studio.

To create the piece, Rubenstein will work with a local River Falls fabricator, who will use a computer-driven plasma cutter to cut the metal into Rubenstein's designs. Rubenstein is committed to sustainable art production, utilizing practices including recycling glass scraps for future pieces and picking up glass and metal supplies locally, eliminating the need for packing and shipping.

"Art Is Power" will be yet another unique work of art Rubenstein has created for the River Falls community. Other notable works include a 20-foot glass standing sculpture of the Kinnikinic River in the UWRF student center, and a fused glass wall sculpture at River Falls High School representing eight distinct ecosystems that Rubenstein worked with students to design.

The substation site where the artwork will be installed is along South Winter Street near the decommissioned power plant, making it highly visible to vehicle and bicycle traffic on South Winter Street, as well as pedestrian traffic from the downtown district and Lake George pathway.

"We're very excited to see this piece further enhance our beautiful city and draw more people to our extensive walking trails downtown and around Lake George," Mayor Toland said. "Public art encourages people to get out and interact with public spaces, helping build better connected communities. We believe Bonnie's work will help us achieve that."

"Art Is Power" is expected to be installed at the Winter Street substation near the end of 2021.

The lowdown: 2021 revaluation



2021 Revaluation

IN FOCUS

It has been six years since the last City-wide revaluation of all property. Because previously assessed values no longer reflect current market values, assessors have reviewed valid market sales to set your new value/s for 2021.

Revaluation does not always mean a tax increase.

A revaluation does not change the amount of taxes collected by the City. However, your home's new assessed value for 2021 may affect your property's % share of taxes.



$$\text{MILL RATE} = \frac{\text{TOTAL TAXES NEEDED}}{\text{TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE}}$$



How will new assessed values affect the mill rate?

The 2021 revaluation increased most of the assessed value of properties in River Falls. When assessed values increase and no new taxes are collected, the mill rate decreases.

2020

\$180,000 average
assessed value

x



2021

\$250,000 average
assessed value

x

0.007744647 mill rate
=
\$1,394 estimated City
portion of property tax
bill for average assessed
value home



0.00532675 mill rate
=
\$1,332 estimated
City portion of property
tax bill for average
assessed value home

LEARN MORE

Visit our website for more information:
www.rfcity.org/208/property-assessment

RFMU powers ahead in renewable energy



Mike Peters (left), President and CEO of WPPI Energy, and Kevin Westhuis (right), Utilities Director at the City of River Falls, celebrate the grand opening of the 100-megawatt Point Beach Solar Energy Center.

The City of River Falls has again received national recognition from the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) for its renewable energy efforts.

In October 2021, NREL released its rankings of renewable energy efforts by municipal utilities nationwide, revealing that River Falls Municipal Utilities (RFMU) ranks **third in the nation** for Green Power Participation and **fifth in the nation** for Green Power Sales Rate.

NREL's list for Green Power Participation Rates measures the percentage of customers who participated in a utility's renewable or "green" energy programs. In 2020, about 12% of RFMU customers voluntarily participated in Choose Renewable, an RFMU program that invites customers to purchase renewable energy blocks for their homes.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Utility</u>	<u>Sales Rate</u>
1	Portland General Electric	26%
2	Farmers Electric Cooperative	19.21%
3	River Falls Municipal Utilities	11.93%
4	Alameda Municipal Power	10.29%
5	PacifiCorp (Blue Sky Usage and Habitat)	6.55%

Source: U.S. Department of Energy, National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2020

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Utility</u>	<u>Sales Rate</u>
1	Portland General Electric (Green Future Choice)	21.39%
2	Silicon Valley Power	11.40%
3	PacifiCorp (Blue Sky Usage and Habitat)	7.50%
4	Portland General Electric (Green Future Enterprise)	7.49%
5	River Falls Municipal Utilities	6.55%

Source: U.S. Department of Energy, National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2020

The Green Power Sales Rate list compares the ratio of a utility's renewable energy sales to total sales. In 2020, renewable energy accounted for 6.55% of RFMU's sales -- up from 4.16% in 2019, the last year NREL compiled this data.

Choose Renewable, RFMU's most popular program, played a large role in the City's ability to obtain its high rankings.

The program invites customers to [sign up to purchase renewable energy blocks](#) for two dollars apiece per month, which allows RFMU greater access to renewable energy programs to help power the City's electric grid.

Sources of renewable energy utilized by the program include wind turbines in southwest Minnesota; wind farms in Dodge County and Font du Lac County, Wisconsin, and Joice, Iowa; a biogas-to-energy facility in Wisconsin's Fox Valley; and the new Point Beach Solar Energy Center near Two Rivers, Wisconsin. A typical home can be considered to run on clean energy with the purchase of three blocks.

"One of the great things about being a municipal electric utility is that we are able to reflect our local communities values in the actions we take," Kevin Westhuis, City of River Falls Utilities Director, said. "Our residents are passionate about consuming cleaner energy to help preserve the natural resources of our community and beyond, and we are able to work together to accomplish that goal by creating programs like Choose Renewable."

Other opportunities for City residents to utilize clean energy in their homes include purchasing solar panels at River Falls Community Solar, a solar garden connected to the City's utility grid. Community Solar subscribers not only help increase the amount of clean energy powering the city, but also receive a credit on their monthly electric bill based on how much solar energy was produced that month. The City can also assist residents interested in purchasing panels for their own homes. Contact the City's Conservation and Efficiency Coordinator, [Mike Noreen](#), for more information.

"We're proud of the people of River Falls for keeping our relatively small community on the map with major players when it comes to renewable energy," Westhuis said. "I hope we're able to continue working together to lead the way until every community in the nation runs on 100% renewable energy."

News you can use



River Falls City Hall shows off its signature winter look.

Winter readiness

A few reminders as we head into winter:

- Test your CO (carbon monoxide) detectors. According to the Centers for Disease Control, carbon monoxide poisoning is responsible for more than 50,000 emergency department visits and more than 400 deaths annually.
- For winter heating tips, click [here](#).
- When shoveling, please include sidewalks in the right-of-way as well as pedestrian curbs/ramps on corner lots.
- Be a "hydrant hero" and shovel around hydrants so Fire Department volunteers have easy access.
- During snowstorms, do not place garbage cans in the street or alley.

Odd-even parking

For every night between November 1 and March 31, alternate night, or odd-even parking, is in effect. Odd-even parking means vehicles should be parked on the odd side of a street designated by property addresses on odd days of the month, and on the even side of the street on even days of the month. Remember to park according to the date after midnight so your vehicle is on the right side of the street in the morning.

Dog licenses

The City of River Falls requires that all dogs five months of age or older be licensed. The license year is January 1 through December 31. In order to process a dog license, a completed dog license application, payment for license fee, and current rabies vaccination record must be provided to the City.

The license fee is \$5 for dogs who are spayed/neutered and \$10 for dogs who are not. Residents who complete dog license applications after March 31 must pay a \$5 late fee per application. The late fee does not apply to dogs being licensed for the first

time in the City of River Falls.

City residents may apply for a dog license by mail, in person, or by using the utility drop box. Visit www.rfcity.org/466/Dog-License for more information.

Deer waste disposal

Calling all hunters! Evidence shows that Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) can be spread by the improper dumping of deer carcasses. The River Falls Sportsmen's Club, Wisconsin DNR, and City of River Falls are working together to provide deer hunters with a safe, convenient, and hygienic disposal option. A deer carcass waste dumpster will be located in River Falls during this year's gun deer hunting season.

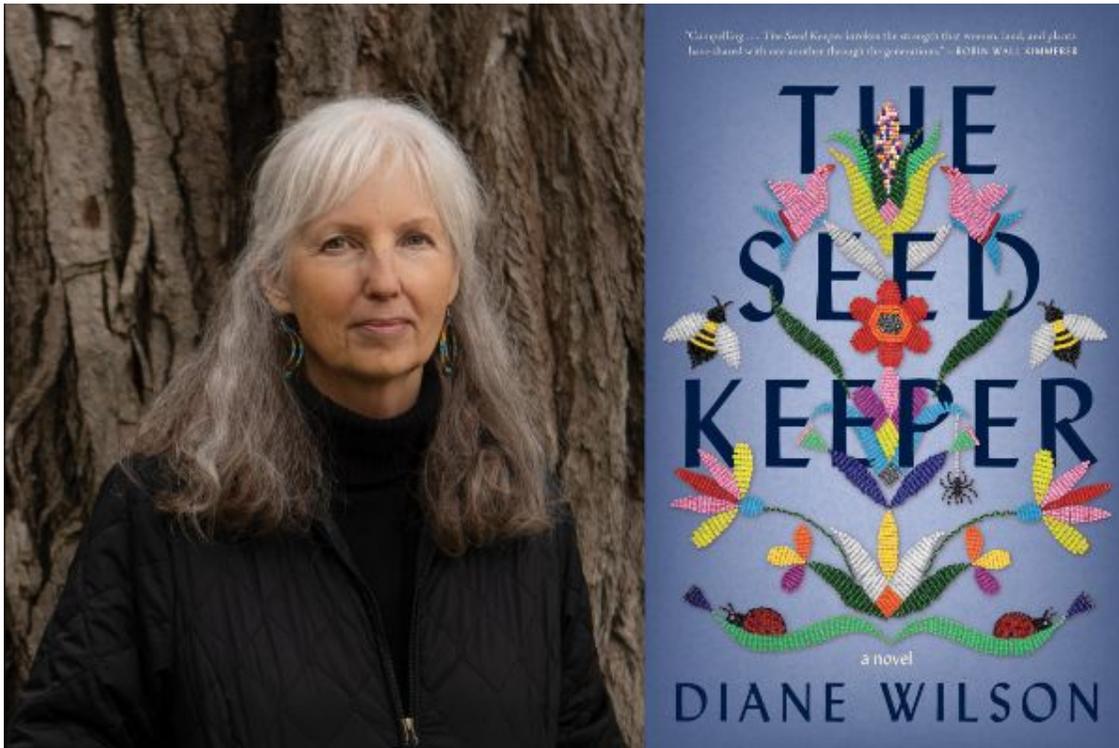
- **Where?** Located at the end of Apollo Road, near the River Falls wastewater treatment plant.
- **When?** Dumpster available 24 hours a day from Nov. 17 to approx. Dec. 1.
- **How much?** Deer carcass disposal is free.

Park news

And in Park and Recreation news...

- Indoor/outdoor shelters can be rented through Dec. 31 for 2021.
- Rentals for 2022 can be requested [online](#) beginning Jan. 1 at 8 a.m. (create an account before making a request if you are new to the system). Reservations can also be made by phone beginning Jan. 3 at 715-425-0924; or via email to cdanke@rfcity.org or brundle@rfcity.org.

Library happenings



Hear author Diane Wilson read from her newest novel, "The Seed Keeper," at River Falls Public Library.

Upcoming Programs

Author Diane Wilson

Thursday, December 2 at 6:30pm

Lower Level Community Room or on the [Library Facebook page](#) or [Youtube channel](#)

Join Diane Wilson for a reading of her newest work, "The Seed Keeper," at River Falls Public Library. A haunting novel spanning several generations, *The Seed Keeper* follows a Dakota family's struggle to preserve their way of life, and their sacrifices to protect what matters most. Pick up a copy from Hudson's Chapter2Books, who will be at the event selling books.

Holiday Open House

Thursday, December 9 from 12pm - 7:30pm

Join the merriment at the River Falls Public Library 2021 holiday open house! Enjoy live music, refreshments, and make-and-take craft kits. Free. All ages welcome.

Author Abby Jimenez - Virtual Only

Thursday, December 9 at 6:30pm

Watch in the Lower Level Community Room or on the [Library Facebook page](#) or [Youtube channel](#)

Minnesota-based author Abby Jimenez is a Food Network "Cupcake Wars" champion, founder of acclaimed Twin Cities cupcake shop Nadia Cakes, and New York Times bestselling author. Join her for a reading and discussion of her newest romance novel *Life's Too Short*, and pick up a copy from Chapter2Books.

Tribute to John Lennon and the Beatles

Sunday, December 12 from 1:30 - 3:30pm

Lower Level Community Room

Head over the library for a joyous music and poetry jam hosted by Thomas R. Smith and friends.

Community events



Community members rejoice in holiday cheer at the 2019 River Dazzle celebration.

Turkey Trot for Heroes

Thursday, Nov. 25, 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Rush River Brewing Company
990 Antler Ct., River Falls, WI

The Thanksgiving Turkey Trot is back! The River Falls Chamber of Commerce will be co-hosting with Rush River Brewery. Start off the holidays with a 5k walk/run and support Sheep Dog Impact Assistance of the Greater Twin Cities. Both virtual and in-person options are available; virtual participants may complete the run anywhere and at any time. In-person participants completing the run in River Falls will receive a pint and t-shirt for signing up. To provide an energy boost before and after, Mindful Fork Meal Prep and 2 Broke Chefs will be in attendance. Whether you join in-person or take part virtually, the Chamber of Commerce invites you to run, walk, network, and have fun!

\$50 early bird pricing through November 21; \$60 standard registration after. Register [here](#).

River Dazzle

Friday, Nov. 26, 1-7 p.m.

Main Street, River Falls, WI

Kick off the season with some holiday cheer on Main Street! Events throughout the

day include photos with Mr. and Mrs. Claus, holiday trolley rides, caroling by River Falls High School students, a free family-friendly matinee of "Elf" at the Falls Theatre, the annual Chili Crawl, and the River Dazzle holiday parade. Bring the whole family and head downtown to get in the spirit!

Free; no registration required. Full schedule of events [here](#).

Thanks for joining us!

We are pleased to bring you this issue of e-Source, your source of news and information about the City of River Falls. If you missed any previous installments, you can read them [here](#).

As always, your feedback about this publication and its contents is welcome. We'd also like to hear about anything else on your mind. Use this [online form](#) to share your thoughts and questions.

If this e-Source was shared with you and you'd like to be added to our email list, click [here](#). Of course, you are welcome to [opt-out](#) at any time; but we hope you won't!



Copyright © 2021 City of River Falls; all rights reserved.

City of River Falls
222 Lewis St., River Falls, WI 54022
715-425-0900
Communications@rfcity.org

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

Send us [your feedback](#)!