



  
City of  
RIVER FALLS

# CREATING OUR RESILIENT FUTURE

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





CITY OF RIVER FALLS

### Mission:

To coordinate and deliver essential services and ensure a sustainable future.

### Vision:

A distinct, vibrant, and safe community with an abundance of nature and easy access to metropolitan amenities. A place where families, students, and businesses flourish.

### Values:

- Put people first
- Pursue excellence
- Act with integrity
- Embrace change
- Serve our community
- Consider future generations

## Dear Friends,

2021 required creativity and patience to navigate many challenges, but we were able to find resolve with the good citizens of River Falls walking this journey with us. Thank you for collaborating with us to renew the sense of community that makes our city special, for sharing your input to help us improve, and for trusting us to lead through times of change. With our values guiding us, and your support, we can face any challenges ahead.

This report reflects development, projects, and initiatives that were all made possible through our valued relationships with community partners and residents. You are our inspiration and our guide, and your input determines the future direction of our great city.

The reason we exist is to coordinate and deliver the essential services that ensure a sustainable future for the City of River Falls. As we navigate the City's 2022 long-range planning process, Focus River Falls, we want to hear from you. Visit [engagerf.org](http://engagerf.org) to let us know what's important to you as we chart the City's path for the next 25 years.

Dan Toland, Mayor



Scot Simpson, City Administrator



### Cookout Conversations

After being apart for much of 2020, the City embraced the opportunity to get back out and connect with the community. In 2021, the Mayor's Cookout Conversations returned, with Mayor Dan Toland breaking out the hotdogs and pop with City residents at Highview Meadows Park, Wells Park, the Kinni Trail, and Glen Park from July through October.



### Run with the Cops

River Falls Police officers joined forces with UWRF and neighboring law enforcement agencies in October 2021 to bring back Run with the Cops, a 5k community run/walk to raise funds for Special Olympics Wisconsin athletes. The family friendly event featured opportunities for kids to compete with officers on an obstacle course, an interactive vehicle expo, and a doughnut eating contest.



### Clifford the Big Red Truck

In May, the City launched a contest to select a name for its new utility truck. The public cast nearly 350 votes and suggested over 120 names. Now, Clifford the Big Red Truck is fully in service.

“ Getting to spend time with community members and hear what they're passionate about is an integral part of doing our jobs as a City Council. *Dan Toland, City of River Falls Mayor*

# PUT PEOPLE FIRST



## City Council chambers get an upgrade

The City's IT and building maintenance staffs were engaged in critical work to further improve community engagement and participation in 2021. To ensure that community members can access public City meetings with ease whether virtually or in person, the team executed a redesign of City Council chambers. Staff replaced video cameras and monitors to provide higher definition video; replaced the presentation podium with a document camera and touchscreen monitor, allowing presenters to easily zoom in on documents and maps; and integrated the room's audio into the new video system to improve sound quality.



IT Specialist Jon Smits tests out the new equipment.

## IT powers up the new PD

In addition to completing the big changes at City Hall, the IT department made integral contributions to get the new River Falls Police Department facility up and running. Staff provided technical support to connect and integrate the electronic equipment in the PD's new emergency operations center, as well as connected the PD to the new shared records management system (RMS) with St. Croix County. The IT department's hard work has helped strengthen the communications that are integral to keeping the River Falls community safe.



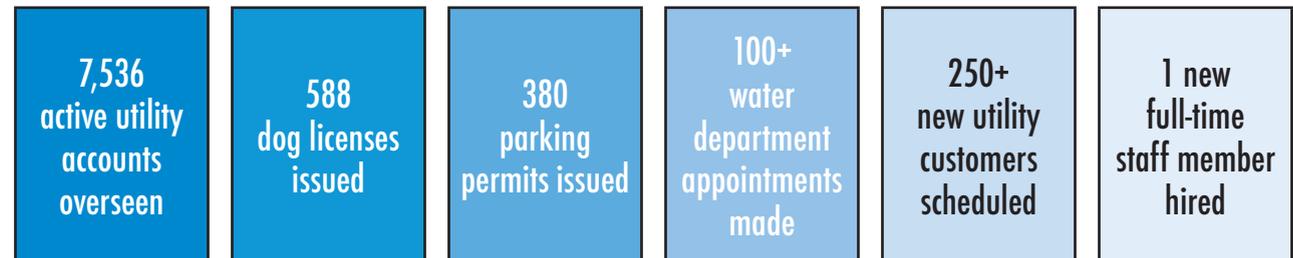
The Emergency Operations Center at the new River Falls Police Department.



Customer service team members Brenda Rundle, Jackie Sahnaw, Wendy Tokheim, and Lisa Benedict.

### Customer service excels

Even through several operational changes in response to evolving public health guidance in 2021, the City's customer service department continued to put people first and provide the community with exceptional service.



### The City focuses on employees

From executing successful recruitment strategies to smoothly onboarding new employees, the HR department was integral in attracting a group of dedicated public servants who exemplify the City's mission, vision, and values. In 2021, HR led the way in a hiring initiative that brought 25 new full- and part-time employees to the City.

### Finding work that works

The City's eye wasn't only on recruitment in 2021. Administrators also developed initiatives to retain skilled and passionate employees. Understanding that people need to feel their best to give their best, the organization launched Dress for Your Day, which encourages employees to embrace comfortable workwear, and Work Your Day, which allows for flexibility to work in non-traditional workspaces and hours.



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team members Ellen Fredrich, Kathryn Paquet, Amy White, Kendra Ellner, Jason Stroud, Jon Smits, Tanya Misselt, Jaime Isaac, and Karen Bergstrom.

### A commitment to all

Recognizing the importance of fostering a work environment where everyone can thrive, the City took steps to cement its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in 2021. City staff formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team in January, while City Council provided support of the team's framework by adopting the Resolution Supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in December.

# PUT PEOPLE FIRST



## City Council advances legislative priorities

On April 22, 2021, City of River Falls Mayor Dan Toland addressed the Wisconsin Joint Finance Committee to advocate for the River Falls City Council's legislative priorities, which included changes to the emergency mental health detention process and the construction of a new science and technology building at UWRF.

### UWRF Sci Tech Building

The City Council voted to support a funding priority for the proposed UWRF Science & Technology Innovation Center. On June 8, 2021, the state legislature's Joint Finance Committee approved \$111.73 million out of the project's total \$116.73 million budget.

### Emergency mental health detention process

A priority proposal addressing the emergency mental health detention process received a successful push forward on October 20, 2021, when the Wisconsin State Building Commission voted to release \$15 million that will be used to add 22 hospital beds designated for mental health treatment in Western Wisconsin.

## Coming together for pedestrian safety

In September 2021, the School District of River Falls received a donation from the Dennis and Carol Ireland Family Community Fund to install new push-button technology with specialized blinking lights at non-stop controlled intersections near three district schools: Greenwood Elementary, Rocky Branch Elementary, and River Falls High School. The completion of the project was made possible through a collaboration between the School District, the City of River Falls, and the River Falls Community Foundation.



“These new signs have the potential of saving lives in our community. We are grateful to the generosity of the Ireland Family, the Community Foundation, and the City for helping make this possible.” *Jamie Benson, School District of River Falls Superintendent*



## Powell Falls Dam decommissioning in progress

2021 brought significant advancements toward the community's goal of restoring the natural flow of the Kinnickinnic River by removing Powell Falls Dam by 2026. The City established formal letters of agreement and memorandums of understanding with the Kinni Corridor Collaborative to solidify cooperation between the two entities. Efforts completed in 2021 laid the groundwork for full decommissioning to become a reality in 2022.



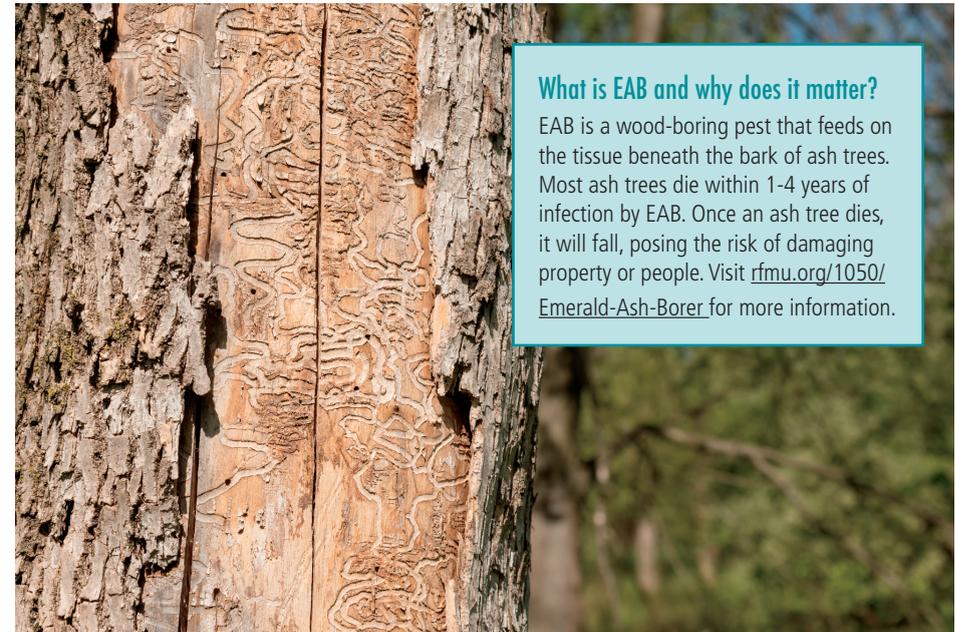
## The PD moves into its new home

In March 2021, the police department moved to its new home at 2815 Prairie Drive. The City turned a 15-year-old newspaper building into a state-of-the-art police station, creatively reusing an existing structure to meet the needs of a modern-day police force. The project saved taxpayers \$3 million from the amount originally budgeted to construct an entirely new building.

## The City takes action on EAB

Embracing change in 2021 included taking action to mitigate the damage caused by the arrival of the emerald ash borer (EAB) in River Falls. Over the last year, the City:

- Applied for and received a \$25,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which was earmarked for ash tree removal, tree purchases and planting, and public education
- Coordinated the removal of 250 ash trees citywide
- Developed the Tree Advisory Committee (TAC), a group of City and community leaders from diverse professional backgrounds that provide counsel to the City Forester on EAB



### What is EAB and why does it matter?

EAB is a wood-boring pest that feeds on the tissue beneath the bark of ash trees. Most ash trees die within 1-4 years of infection by EAB. Once an ash tree dies, it will fall, posing the risk of damaging property or people. Visit [rfmu.org/1050/Emerald-Ash-Borer](https://rfmu.org/1050/Emerald-Ash-Borer) for more information.

Woodpeckers often feed on trees infested with EAB, scratching the outer bark off to reach the pests. This is called "blonding," and is a clear sign of infection.

# PURSUE EXCELLENCE



City Clerk Amy White leads a Badger Books training session for poll workers.

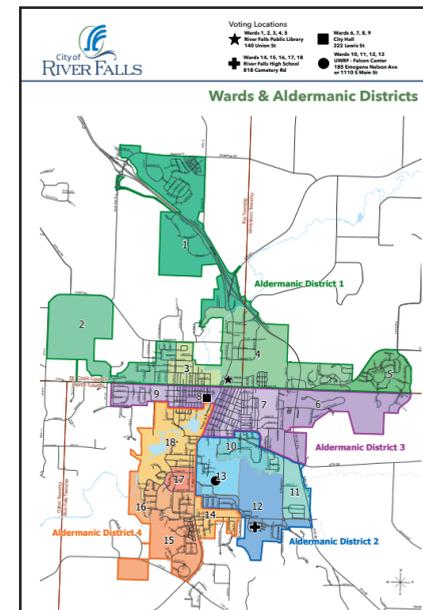
## Progress in election efficiency

The City's elections team excelled in the administration of four elections in 2021. The team was able to reach new heights of efficiency due to the transition to Badger Books, electronic pollbooks created by the Wisconsin Election Commission for use by municipalities. To date, all City polling locations are equipped with Badger Books, ensuring that easy and efficient Election Day processes continue into the future.

“With Badger Books, I’m able to see if the voter standing in front of me is up to date in their registration and is in the right precinct. I can move them through the voting process without having to flip through pages in the poll books looking for their name. It saves substantial time and frustration.”  
*Patricia LaRue, poll worker*

## 2020 Census

In August 2021, the City received its population count for the 2020 Census: 16,182 residents, up from 15,000 in 2010. The City of River Falls had a self-response rate of 77.7%. Additionally, the enumeration rate for the state of Wisconsin was 99.9%, meaning that nearly all of the households the Census Bureau attempted to count were ultimately counted.



## Redistricting

When the Census population count is conducted every 10 years, the information is provided to local clerks and governments to allow them to update their district maps. Doing so ensures that each district or ward in their communities contains as close as possible to an equal number of residents.

The City of River Falls is required to define ward lines within the Pierce and St. Croix County supervisory boundaries. The City Council reviewed and approved the ward and aldermanic district plans on October 12, 2021.

### River Falls chooses renewable

In October 2021, the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory released its rankings of renewable energy efforts by municipal utilities nationwide, ranking River Falls Municipal Utilities third in the nation for Green Power Participation and fifth in the nation for Green Power Sales Rate. Attaining these rankings wouldn't be possible without RFMU customers, who have chosen to invest in a greener future by participating in City programs like Choose Renewable.



#### What is Choose Renewable?

Choose Renewable invites customers to purchase renewable energy blocks for their homes. These sales provide the funds needed for RFMU to gain greater access to renewable energy sources. Visit [rfmu.org/674/Renewable-Energy-Block-Program](http://rfmu.org/674/Renewable-Energy-Block-Program) to learn more.

### River Falls Municipal Utilities continues to set the standard

Year after year, the City of River Falls receives recognition for providing outstanding service to its municipal utility customers, and 2021 was no different. Thanks to the hard work of staff, the City received honors from the American Public Power Association (APPA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), recognizing outstanding work in its electric, water, and wastewater operations.



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."  
*Kevin Westhuis, River Falls Municipal Utilities Director*

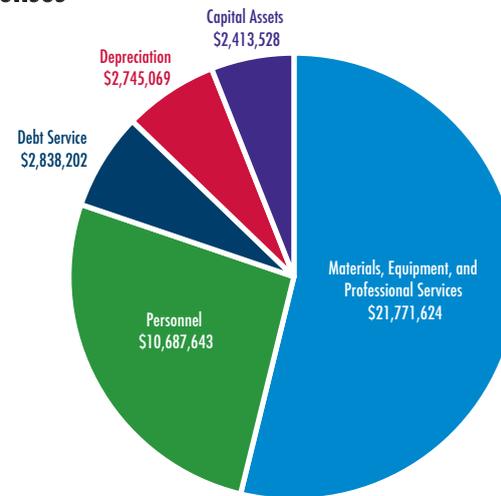
# ACT WITH INTEGRITY

## Continuing responsible stewardship

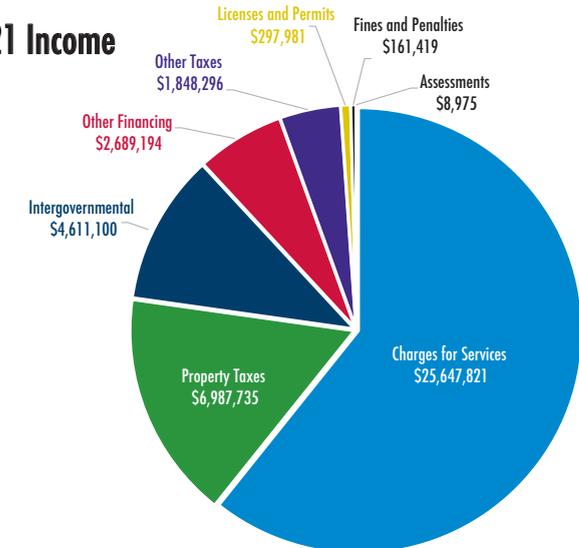
In 2021, the City continued its practice of paring back large costs in response to the pandemic, which resulted in no new debt being issued. The City also spent the year laying critical groundwork for a transition to post-COVID projects and operations. Staff evaluated options for allocating American Rescue Plan Act funds and developed a 2022-2026 capital improvement plan. Further, the City Council approved two new tax increment districts (TIDs) in River Falls.

Visit [rfcity.org/389/Transparency](http://rfcity.org/389/Transparency) for more information on City finances.

### 2021 Expenses



### 2021 Income



### Where do your property taxes go?

Multiple funding sources support City services and operations; the majority are from user fees for electric, water, and sewer charges to customers. While the property tax levy supports City operations, it also supports other jurisdictions.



## New TIDs Support Development

Tax increment financing is a critical tool that allows municipalities to invest in community improvements at a manageable cost. In 2021, the City of River Falls added two new tax incremental districts (TIDs): TID 17 and TID 18.



Tattersall Distilling (TID 17)

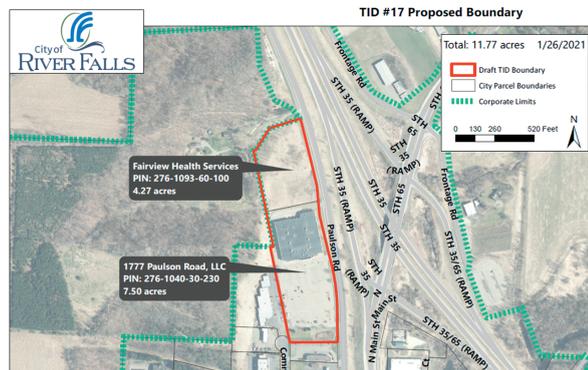


The Sycamore (TID 18)

**Wait – what exactly is a TID?**  
 TIDs are geographic areas slated for development or redevelopment. Once new development is constructed, the market value of the properties within the TID rise, leading to higher property taxes. That additional revenue is then used to fund some of the development costs.

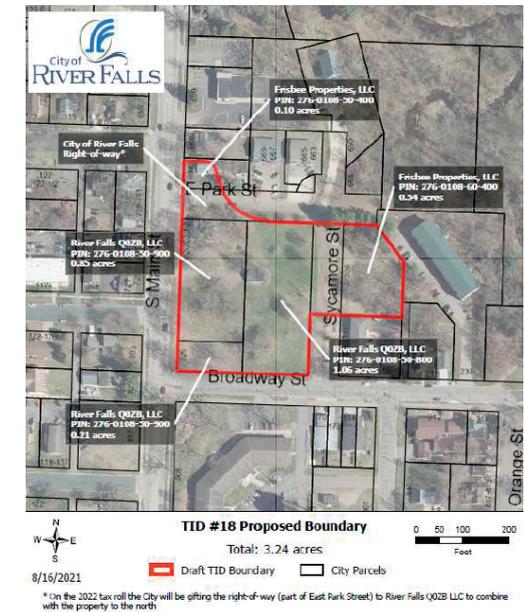
### TID 17

TID 17 encompasses approximately 11.77 acres and includes the new Tattersall Distilling and adjacent Paulson Road property to the north. The Tattersall facility, which has already made a large-scale regional impact since its opening in December 2021, includes a distillery, multi-use event center, and restaurant. Anticipated project costs include property acquisition, stormwater improvements, trailhead construction and improvements, bridge and street maintenance, sidewalk infill, development incentives, Kinni Corridor Plan projects, water tower construction, and contributions to a revolving loan fund. The City anticipates that the district will generate sufficient tax increment to pay all project costs within 25 years.



### TID 18

TID 18 encompasses approximately 3.24 acres and contains five parcels of land. The district was created to support the costs of development incentives for the 700 South Main Project and additional infrastructure within a half mile. The 700 South Main Project, known as The Sycamore of River Falls, will include underground and surface parking as well as four 55+ independent living patio townhomes. Projects anticipated for the area include property acquisition, street and alley construction and maintenance, bridge maintenance, intersection improvements, future park and/or Kinni River Corridor Plan projects, and bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure. The City anticipates that TID 18 will generate sufficient tax increment to pay all project costs within its allowable 27 years.



# SERVE OUR COMMUNITY

## Historic panels tell the Glen Park story

In July 2021, the City's public works crew installed eight historic panels on the exterior walls of Glen Park Pavilion. The panels contain photographs taken in and around the park throughout history. The City's Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) and River Falls Park Board selected photographs that tell the park's story, capturing the notable changes that have occurred over time.



“We hope that the panels will create an engaging and educational experience for park visitors, highlighting the rich history of the oldest park in River Falls.” *Jayne Hoffman, Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) Member*

## Open swim returns

In summer 2021, open swim returned to Glen Park to the delight of the River Falls community. With many eager to resume a beloved summer pastime, the City recorded the highest attendance in the pool's history. Between June 3 and August 27, 9,525 swimmers headed over to splash around and escape the heat, while 558 children enrolled in swimming lessons.



## The community embraces Glen Park Pavilion

2021 was the first full year of operation for Glen Park Pavilion and the community embraced the new space. The pavilion, which includes a 28' x 40' event room, kitchenette, and garage doors that open to an outdoor patio, accounted for nearly 75% of the City's \$34,855 of shelter revenue in 2021.



**The City harnesses the power of public art**

In September 2021, River Falls artist Bonnie Rubinstein was selected to create a site-specific work to complement the City’s recently updated electric substation on South Winter Street. “The Power of Art” depicts a series of blue and aqua water elements, constructed of aluminum, that represent the treasured Kinnickinnic River, which has served as a source of electrical power in the city for many years. Funding for the project came from the City’s 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 in the city.



“ I wanted to honor the past and the present in the art piece. I hope that it brings beauty to the space while celebrating both the significance of the substation and the city’s history.” *Bonnie Rubenstein, River Falls artist*

**River Falls Fire Department service and response**

In 2021, the River Falls Fire Department continued its hard work to keep the community safe. The department responded to 303 total calls, varying from gas leaks to assisting Police and Emergency Medical Services. Calls increased by 4% from 2020 to 2021, and the majority were within city limits.

Type of Call	Number of Calls
Rescue or EMS	84
False alarm	73
Building or other fire	48
Good intent (non-emergency calls for smoke, etc.)	44
Hazardous conditions (gas leaks, fuel spills, etc.)	31
Service (lift assists, smoke removal, etc.)	20
Severe weather/natural disaster	2
Explosion (no fire)	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303</b>



# CONSIDER FUTURE GENERATIONS

## New housing development remains high priority

Over 160 units of single-family housing were built in River Falls between 2020 and 2021. Not only do these developments provide increased housing capacity in the city, but they also pay for improvements in the neighborhoods where they are located. Community improvements made possible through developer funding include new sidewalks from Main Street to Cemetery Road past Wells Park, the renovation of Glover Schoolhouse and refurbishment of the paths in DeSanctis Park, and improvements to Park Street/Main Street.

Housing	2020		2021	
	Permits (Units)	Value	Permits (Units)	Value
New Single Family	87 (87 units)	\$18,863,123	76 (76 units)	\$19,020,920
New Multifamily	10 (194 units)	\$22,183,782	4 (32 units)	\$2,797,384
Addition/Alteration	196 (n/a)	\$2,243,857	210 (n/a)	\$2,359,431
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>320 permits 281 units</b>	<b>\$43,290,762</b>	<b>324 permits 108 units</b>	<b>\$24,177,735</b>

**Did you know?**  
River Falls has a housing vacancy rate of just 1.2% compared to the national average of 7%. After completing a housing study, the City is engaged in planning to make adequate housing a reality in River Falls. Visit [rfmu.org/951/Housing](http://rfmu.org/951/Housing) for more information.

## 2021 Residential Projects



Milltown Residences

- 1300 South Main
- Sterling Ponds 3rd Addition
- Peregrine Terrace
- Highview Meadows 5th Addition
- Milltown Residences

## 2022 Planned Residential Projects



The Sycamore of River Falls at 700 South Main

- Wasson Townhomes
- Dawes Place
- Sterling Ponds 4th Addition
- Highview Meadows 7th Addition
- SouthPointe
- Lake George Lofts
- Radio Rd./ Paulson Rd. Annexation
- Dawes Phase 2
- The Sycamore of River Falls at 70 South Main

## Infrastructure improvements



### Hwy 29

In 2021, State Highway 29 was reconstructed from Prescott to River Falls. The City coordinated with the DOT to install a new sanitary sewer main to replace its aging wastewater lift station south of Cemetery Road. The City also placed water and sewer casings in the ground on the east side of the highway before paving occurred, which provide a shell for future water and sewer lines when the area is developed.



### North Sewer Interceptor Plan

The primary function of the North Sewer Interceptor project is to remove an existing wastewater lift station and construct a gravity sewer main. This area serves 27% of the City's existing development area and is planned to serve 42% percent of future growth.

### Mann Valley

In December 2021, design plans for water, sewer, and roadway construction were completed at Mann Valley Corporate Park. This process was critical to identifying opportunities to enhance design flexibility and ensure Mann Valley remains an attractive location for a wide variety of future businesses.



### Golf View Channel

Intense rainfall events in 2015, 2019, and 2020 caused severe channel erosion that posed a safety and water quality concern. If left unchecked, erosion would have caused damage to neighboring properties. In late 2021, concrete channel armor was installed to prevent future erosion. After approximately 1-2 growing seasons, the channel will appear as a grassed waterway and will be easily maintainable.



# CONSIDER FUTURE GENERATIONS

## Commercial development



Tattersall Distillery and Event Center, which was constructed in the old Shopko building on Paulson Road, was completed in 2021.



Construction was completed on the city's third Kwik Trip fuel station/super convenience store, located on Cemetery Road, in 2021.



Falls Family Eyecare moved from its location in downtown River Falls to the former Bernard's building at the intersection of North Main and Summit Streets in 2021.

## The City launches Focus River Falls: a long-range planning process

In 2021, the City set the stage to begin updating its comprehensive plan. The plan will guide the City's actions on housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, natural and cultural resources, economic development, and more for the next 25 years. But that's not all! The City is also completing critical updates to its bike & pedestrian and outdoor recreation plans. The collective effort to update the three plans, Focus River Falls, is now in full swing. Tell us what you want the city's future to look like at [engagerf.org](https://engagerf.org)



“ Laying the foundation for our long range plan updates in 2021 was exciting for staff and consultants, but it's really the community that we hope will get engaged in this process in 2022. Creating opportunities to gauge resident priorities for the future of our City is important work, but getting substantial feedback and drawing insights from it is even more important. *Amy Peterson, City of River Falls Community Development Director*

# 2021 Boards and Commissions

## Business Improvement District Board

Amy Halvorson  
Russ Korpela  
Joleen Larson  
Terry McKay  
Mike Miller  
Kerri Olson  
Michael Pepin

## City Board of Appeals

Eric Amundsen  
Andrew Brown  
Gary Horvath  
Jeanette Leonard  
Kellen Wells-Mangold

## Park and Recreation Advisory Board

Matt Janquart  
Patricia La Rue  
Jim Nordgren  
Brenda Gaulke  
Melissa Pedrini  
Brandon Dobbertin  
Sean Downing

## Police and Fire Commission

Jon Longsdorf  
Dick Rinehart  
Gary Donath  
Grant Hanson  
Mark Sams

## Utility Advisory Board

Scott Morrisette  
Mark Spafford  
Tim Thum  
Kellen Wells-Mangold  
Mark Wespetal

## Historic Preservation Commission

Denton Anderson  
Mark Anderson  
Pam Friede  
Heidi Heinze  
Jayne Hoffman  
Julie Huebel  
Ben Plunkett

## Library Board

Joyce Breen  
Rebecca Ferguson  
Kari Heinselman  
Ruth Kuss  
Michael Metro  
Alyssa Mueller  
Jean Ritzinger  
Wayne Roen  
Whitney Rudesill

## Plan Commission

Dan Toland, Mayor  
Patricia La Rue  
Mike Woolsey  
Lisa Moody  
Rebecca Pendergast  
Chris Holtkamp  
Diane Odeen

## River Falls Housing Authority

Todd Bjerstad  
Matt Fitzgerald  
Jacqueline Niccum  
Amy Peterson  
Jacob Proue



## Mayor and City Council

Dan Toland, Mayor

District 1 Sean Downing

District 2 Nick Carow

District 3 Alyssa Mueller

District 4 Todd Bjerstedt

At-Large Scott Morrisette

At-Large Diane Odeen

At-Large Ben Plunkett\*

At-Large Jeff Bjork\*\*

*\*Served from 2020-2022*

*\*\*Elected in 2022*

# CREATING OUR RESILIENT FUTURE

## 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

### Our Values

- Put people first
- Pursue excellence
- Act with integrity
- Embrace change
- Serve our community
- Consider future generations

715-425-0900

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