



## RIVER FALLS CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP REGARDING LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2023

January 10, 2023, 5 p.m., Training Room, City Hall

**City Council Members Present:** Mayor Dan Toland, Todd Bjerstedt, Jeff Bjork, Sean Downing, Scott Morrisette, Alyssa Mueller (came at 5:57 p.m.) Diane Odeen, Nick Carow (came 5:15 p.m.)

**Members Absent:** none

**City Staff Present:** City Administrator Scot Simpson; Administrative Services Director/City Clerk Amy White; IT Specialist Jonathan Thoen; Management Analyst Ellen Massey; Library Director Tanya Misselt; Police Chief Gordon Young; Community Development Director Amy Peterson; Assistant to the City Administrator Jennifer Smith

**Remote:** Brent Merchant, Fiona McLeod, Mark McIntyre, Tristan Southard

**Others:** Ben Fochs

At 5 p.m., the workshop was called to order. City Administrator Simpson provided an introduction. Council has received several documents. The end product will be a priority draft at a council meeting which will become platform for legislative priorities for the community.

Simpson showed a slide of the agenda and recent legislative achievements. Recent successes include Powell Avenue Dam Removal grant, West Central Biosolids Facility Improvements, State Transportation Long-term Funding, State Emergency Detention Bed Process, UWRF Sci Tech, ARPA Funding and Funding Flexibility.

Aldersperson Morrissette asked for an update on the State Emergency Detention Bed Process.

Chief Young last heard was that money was received for two facilities in the Eau Claire area. It would be an addition to an existing hospital 32 beds some juvenile and some adults. It would be opened for emergency detention. There was further discussion.

Simpson talked about why we hold the workshop. He talked about focusing on city priorities and applying for grants. He talked about speaking with one voice and having a diverse revenue source. Aldersperson Bjork asked about the lobbying group and where the city is in their pecking order. Simpson said we are the only city in Wisconsin they represent. He talked about a wave of federal money, and it doesn't look like it will change. It is a unique time for local governments to have access to federal monies.

Simpson talked about current conditions in Wisconsin's and the federal government and lobbying. In 2023-2024, Simpson thinks there are four areas identified seeking funding for legacy projects like the Kinni Corridor plan, Mann Valley, a fire station, and increasing money to meet our CIP goals. He talked about Merchant McIntyre doing an action plan.

Simpson turned the presentation over to Brent Merchant from Merchant McIntyre Associates. Merchant said they work with many local governments, but River Falls is the only city they work with in Wisconsin. He introduced his team including Mark McIntyre, Tristan Southard, and Fiona McLeod. He said the group works for local governments across the country. He talked about who they serve. Their specialty is identifying and securing competitive grant funding. They are excited to get to know River Falls. Merchant reiterated that current conditions in Washington are unique. The number of dollars available presents a massive number of

opportunities for grants. They take a strategic look at funding. Their goal is to be able to secure/write the grant funding before grant is announced. He spoke more about winning grants and timing.

McIntyre talked about the amount of money in Washington which is unique. He loved that Bjork asked if River Falls would be a top priority for them saying we serve nonprofit organizations and work with integrity. We avoid conflicts of interest. He talked about a commitment that was made to Simpson, being registered lobbyists, being experts in the process of winning federal funding, and the importance of being located in Washington.

Simpson asked Bjork if his question was answered. He said it was. Simpson talked about the contract. Merchant said they view it as a partnership and spoke further.

Simpson asked if council had questions. Bjork asked if we are looking to try and get money back. Are we looking to recoup money? Simpson said we are focused on existing infrastructure law on the federal level – how to get the earmarks. When we talk about the state, we will be talking about potential law changes. Merchant said we are competing nationally. We are competing for dollars. There was more discussion and then the team from Merchant McIntyre Associates ended their presentation.

Aldersperson Odeen noted it was exciting going after grants. Aldersperson Bjerstedt asked when council would get the plan. Simpson said their plan would be delivered in February.

Simpson showed a slide on federal and state funding. Aldersperson Carow asked if they talked about strategy with a member of the new congressional delegation. Simpson said no. He addressed Carow's questions and talked about the city's representatives. Odeen said we are in a unique position with of lots of representatives.

Simpson said on the federal side, the focus is on appropriations that are out there. We are trying to figure out the best one or two projects we want for an earmark. We will likely have to narrow it down to one. On the state side, we are working through the biennial budget. He provided an example of the dam grant.

Simpson talked about the legacy projects – Kinni Corridor Plan and implementation, public safety fire station, and economic development with Mann Valley. He thinks biosolids project is too far along to get funding. Simpson provided further information.

He said staff is likely to focus on identified priorities - something council as a group has talked about. Simpson talked about projects in length and provided examples. Aldersperson Downing asked if it included money for renewable energy. Simpson said it could and spoke further.

Aldersperson Mueller asked about housing specifically Section 8. Simpson will talk about it in the conclusion. Simpson said this is one of the biggest opportunities for first time in 20 years to talk about shared revenue. The current mode of funding was implemented in 1911. Ninety percent of income tax was given to cities. The funding was kept in place until the 1970s. In the 2000s, the state froze it and cut the dollar amount. They put together a task force. The result is property tax has become the source of income for most cities. The proposal at this point is to designate 1 cent of 5 cents of the statewide sales tax. Simpson talked about sales tax.

Simpson talked about the state of affairs. He showed the city's shared revenue from 2000-2022. There's a 22 percent reduction in funding from 2003-2022 but state revenues doubled during that time. The state is collecting the revenue and keeping it. Cities, towns, and counties are getting tired for getting blamed for the rise in taxes. In 2022, cities are getting 6.8 percent of the revenue. Simpson talked about movements to get ride of income tax and sales tax.

Aldersperson Bjerstedt asked for clarification on what the city is asking for. Simpson said the proposal was a designation of one percent of the sales tax. Morrisette asked what the formula is to give it back to the city. Simpson said it must be changed in the legislation. We are not recommending a specific plan. Morrisette felt that the city should be pushing the league with a model of what we want. There was continued discussion.

Simpson said to conclude we are focusing on getting more money to city for identified priorities. We want to maintain or increase local control. He doesn't know that we will be aggressive on getting back certain things like rental inspections. It is somewhat similar on housing. We will be focused primarily on money.

Mueller asked if there is a push in the legislature to provide more money to police to provide mental health staff that aren't police officers but could be licensed social workers and could help divert mental health calls from the police. Simpson hasn't seen a comprehensive package. Young said HHS was pushing for a civilian response group. The chiefs have serious doubts because they can't really hire right now. There's no one to do the job. There was further conversation about public safety.

Downing said shared revenue is important, but we haven't talked about an expenditure restraint program which rewards communities that keep their spending below a certain threshold. He thinks River Falls would be one of those communities. Simpson said River Falls has qualified. Downing talked about three benefits of the programs.

There was further discussion about expenditure restraint, movements to eliminate corporate income tax and personal income tax, and state surplus money.

Simpson wrapped up talking about getting the council more information and outreach to legislators. Odeen talked about traveling to Washington and shared her experience. Morrissette talked about the lobbying efforts for St. Croix County.

Workshop adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk