



2019-2020 Legislative Policy Priorities

Allow Biennial Budgeting

Current Wisconsin state statutes do not provide clear authority for a true biennial budgeting process for cities. The City of River Falls has been using the biennial budgeting model since 2015 and it has provided significant administrative time savings, as well as empowering departments more flexibility to manage both revenues and costs. The City supports legislation that Wis. Stat. secs. 65.90 be amended to include language that allows municipalities to create and maintain biennial budgets, which include levy for the biennium.

Allow 10+ Year Financing

Under current state statutes, the City cannot issue general obligation bonds to finance certain projects over twenty (20) years without a permissive or mandatory referendum taking place. This has resulted in the City pursuing promissory notes as financing tools instead, which results in significantly increased interest costs to larger City projects. The City supports legislation that amends Wis. Stat. Chapter 67 to remove the mandatory and permissive referendum requirements for cities.

Close Dark Store Loopholes

The City supports legislation for the implementation of reforms to assessment practices to close “dark store loopholes” that when assessors use sales of comparable properties for determining the value of a property they must use properties that are within the same market segment and similar to the property being assessed with regard to age, condition, use, type of construction, location, design, and economic characteristics. Specifically, the City supports the passage of Senate Bill 130/Assembly Bill 146.

Allow Sharing Between Tax Increment Districts

Under current Wisconsin state statutes, cities can only share tax increment revenue if the donor district has the same overlying taxing jurisdictions. The City supports legislation that allows for a city to allocate positive tax increments from one district to another, that is: the same type, a different type, and in a different county and is not required to be an overlying district.

Increase Library Reimbursement

The River Falls Public Library relies on tax dollars from the City of River Falls and Pierce and St. Croix Counties to operate. Pierce and St. Croix Counties reimburse the library for use by rural residents that don't pay city taxes. The formula for reimbursement is established in state law Act 150 and is based on the number of over-the-counter circulations of books and media made to rural residents. The library receives reimbursement from the surrounding counties for their citizens who check out items from our library. Act 150 only requires that counties reimburse the library at 70% of the actual cost of doing business. The City supports legislation increasing the county reimbursement level from 70% to 100%.

Increase Funding for Transportation Systems

The City supports legislation that increases funding for state-local transportation systems. River Falls has benefited from these funds to help maintain our network of over 70+ miles of roads in the City and the City's shared-ride taxicab program.

Fund Emergency Detention Beds

Beds for people experiencing mental crises that reach the point of an emergency detention are limited in western Wisconsin, forcing River Falls law enforcement to drive those people four hours away to a secure mental hospital in Winnebago County. The round trip to the facility takes about nine hours and requires two officers to perform the escort each time. The City supports legislation to increase availability of emergency detention beds in western Wisconsin.

Allow Pre-Paid Electric and Water Billing

Prepaid metering is in place in many other states and should be a tool that is available for utilities in Wisconsin. Pre-paid metering would not only benefit River Falls, but numerous other public power communities in Wisconsin.

Eliminate Town Incorporation Loophole

The City is in support of legislation that would eliminate the town incorporation loophole. Essentially, this loophole allows towns to avoid the density requirement by picking a couple of subdivisions or other areas, incorporating, and having an intergovernmental agreement with their old town and rolling them in. The most notable examples of this loophole being taken advantage of was the incorporation of the Village of Fox Crossing in 2016 and the current incorporation efforts by the Town of Greenville.

Legislative Funding Priorities

DOT Project ID: 7200-02-03 (Jug Handle)

The City is currently working with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to create a second jug handle ramp at the Division Street interchange with State Highway 35. Traffic volumes continue to increase on the bypass necessitating improvements for traffic accessing the bypass at Division Street. Numerous serious accidents have occurred at the intersection as currently configured, which have prompted the need for continued support for this project from the state to make safety improvements.

DOT Project ID: 7650-01-05 (STH 29 & CTH FF Intersection)

The City is currently working with WisDOT to make safety improvements to the intersection of State Highways 29 and County Highway FF. WisDOT has proposed installing turn lanes with no medians at this intersection, which the City believes to be insufficient compared to preferred reconstructing of the intersection as a roundabout. The City supports contributing additional, reasonable funds in conjunction with WisDOT to reconstruct the intersection as a roundabout.

UW-River Falls Science and Technology Innovation Center

The University of Wisconsin River Falls has proposed the construction of a new \$111 million, 131,000 sq. ft. Science and Technology Innovation Center. This project will play a vital role in providing students with excellent educational experiences, preparing graduates in high-demand areas, and supporting economic growth in northwestern Wisconsin. The City supports legislation that funds the construction of the Science and Technology Innovation Center.

Kinnickinnic River Corridor Plan Implementation

The City Council recently approved the Kinnickinnic River Corridor Plan, which provides a vision and framework for the future of the Kinni River Corridor. Implementation of the vision and goals identified in this plan will rely on a collection of public and private actions on catalyst projects to transform the corridor. The City supports state legislation that would allocate funding for the following projects:

- The removal of Powell Dam: \$500,000 - \$2,000,000
- Construction capital for downtown stormwater plan: \$1,000,000 - \$2,000,000
- Construction of a downtown pedestrian bridge: \$1,600,000

The River Falls City Council passed the 2019-2020 Legislative Priorities on Feb. 26, 2019

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