

City to turn off half of Spring St. lights

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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Citing residents' complaints that road is too bright, Port officials agree to flip switch on 16 street poles

About half the streetlights on South Spring Street will be turned off temporarily later this year as Port Washington officials ponder whether to remove these lights from the area and relocate them to the coal dock.

“We’ve gotten a lot of feedback that it seems to be too bright there,” Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said.

He predicted that turning off the 16 lights would make that stretch of Spring Street from Portview Drive to Sunset Road a little dimmer than the stretch of road between Oakland Avenue and Portview Drive.

Right now, he said, the southern portion of the road is virtually twice as bright as the northern segment.

Last year, Vanden Noven proposed moving 16 streetlights from South Spring Street to the coal dock, where the city will need to install lights along the entrance drive and around a parking lot.

The city would have to pay to move the lights from Spring Street to the coal dock, Vanden Noven said, adding he doesn’t know how much that would cost.

Since the city will pay to maintain the lights whether they are used on Spring Street or at the coal dock, the ongoing costs would be a wash, Vanden Noven said.

Reusing the streetlights is a viable — and green — way to light the coal dock, officials said.

“The coal dock has to be lit, so we’re not increasing our overall energy use. We’re just lighting more area at the same cost,” Ald. Mike Ehrlich, a member of the board, said.

The streetlights are owned by We Energies, and the utility said it would cost \$640 to turn off the 16 lights, Vanden Noven noted.

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If the city decides to turn them back on again after the trial, it would cost another \$640, he added.

“When I think of all the years and all the changes in lights we’ve made, and the amount of negative feedback we’ve gotten — the lights are too bright or too dim — it would be worthwhile to run a test,” Board Chairman Tom Veale said.

“If we get a lot of ‘My gosh, I can’t find my way home,’ we light them again. If we get ‘Thank God it doesn’t look like a landing strip anymore,’ we’ll leave it.

“Personally, I think it’s great — we’ll save money, save some energy and lessen the landing-strip look.”

Even while the lights are turned off for the month-long trial, Vanden Noven said, the city will continue to pay roughly \$20 a month to maintain and light them. That’s because the city has a contract requiring the payment.

Board members said it only makes sense to test the lighting by disabling half the Spring Street lights before taking final action.

“We’ve had a lot of complaints about how bright it is, so it makes sense to show everyone what it will look like on Spring Street (if the lights are removed),” Ehrlich said.

The test is likely to be scheduled late this summer or early fall, when at least part of the entrance drive to the coal dock may be constructed, Vanden Noven said.

The Common Council will be asked to approve the test before it occurs.