

Get ready for a darker Spring Street

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port council weighs cost savings vs. safety in deciding to turn off half the lights along south end of road on trial basis

South Spring Street in Port Washington, which has frequently been compared to an airport runway because of the intense lighting, will be darker soon.

Aldermen recently agreed to spend \$640 to have We Energies turn off every other light between Portview Drive and Sunset Road. This will leave lights lit every 100 feet on alternating sides of the street, which officials said should provide plenty of light.

"It'll be the same as Wisconsin Street," Ald. Jim Vollmar said June 21.

Ald. Joe Dean, however, dissented, saying the city should temporarily turn off the lights to make sure the area isn't too dim without them.

"I do also think a decision of this magnitude is a decision we're going to live with for 40, 50 years," he said. "We should take a look at it first and be sure it will be right."

Earlier in June, the Board of Public Works recommended that the lights be temporarily turned off, an experiment designed to let officials know whether they can move nine of the lights to Lake Street without creating a dark corridor on Spring Street,

Although officials believe the street will still be adequately lit without the lights, board members said they want to be sure before making a permanent change.

"If we pull the poles, there's no going back," Board Chairman Craig Czarnecki said. "We should take a look at it and see what it's going to look like and see if there's a backlash before we do it for good.

"People may say, 'That's great. It's not the landing strip it used to be.' But let's avoid a worst-case scenario. Let's make sure."

But Vollmar, a member of the board, was the lone committee member to vote against the recommendation, noting that many communities are shutting off half their lights after midnight or turning them off all together as a cost-saving measure.

On Tuesday, he made the motion to turn the lights off permanently.

"Just do it," he told the Common Council on Tuesday. "Why would we pay \$600 just to turn them off?"

The city has been pondering the change for more than a year, he noted.

Ald. Mike Ehrlich, who is also a member of the board, said it's important that the city make sure

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Spring Street won't be too dark without these lights.

"My concern is we do it and it's a little too dark there," Ehrlich said.

The cost of testing the lights would be \$1,200 — \$640 each to turn the lights on and off.

"I guarantee that if you do it, you're going to get 50% of the people who like it and 50% who don't," Mayor Scott Huebner said.

Dean questioned the cost of turning out the lights.

"Why does it cost \$640 to turn the lights off?" he asked. "Has anybody said politely (to We Energies) 'Are you out of your mind?' and asked them to do it for nothing?"

Officials had talked to the utility, which owns the lights, but were told there would be a cost, City Administrator Mark Grams said.

Dean said he hoped the city could persuade the utility to waive the cost.

The decision comes as the city plans the reconstruction of Lake Street for fall. Officials are considering removing half the lights from South Spring Street and using nine of them on Lake Street as a cost-saving measure.

The remainder of the lights could be used at the entrance to the coal dock, officials have said.

Moving the streetlights to Lake Street would cost \$24,600, officials said, while installing new lights could cost \$48,500.