

## Afton / Gas lights back on, but only at night

System turns off lamps during day to reduce costs

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Afton is trying to preserve old ways with new techniques.

Some of its old-time gas streetlights in the Old Village area have been fitted with a system that shuts them off during daylight hours. Previously, the lamps ran continuously.

This change comes a few months after a tight city budget prompted Afton officials to extinguish all the lamps, to the dismay of some residents.

"People hold these lights very near and dear," Mayor Julia Welter said.

The new igniter system, provided by Knightronix of New Brighton, is battery-operated and uses photo sensors that recognize daylight.

Arnie Knight, CEO of Knightronix, said the plan will save the city 50 percent on gas costs.

Costs and gas leakage problems slowly put the Old Village in the dark. The city began using only 14 of the 44 streetlights a few years ago, then turned eight of them off in 2006. The cost of running the remaining six was \$7,500 a year. Those were extinguished in February.

"It mushroomed up to a point where we didn't know what to do," Afton Public Works Director Ken Johnson said.

After hearing about the blackout, Knight stepped forward with the idea of applying an igniter system that his company had used successfully in other parts of the country. His system is being tested on eight of the lamps, and the city also added temporary electric lights.

The eight lamps have safer, retrofitted gas heads and burn more brightly than before.

"The provider has been very great about assuring us there's no (gas) leakage," Welter said. "We'll certainly have our public works adviser stay on top of it."

The gas streetlights were erected in the 1960s. Afton is the last city in the state to use them, said interim city administrator Jim Norman.

Johnson and Welter said community response to the relit lamps has been mostly positive. Still, not everyone has noticed.

Kathy Jarvis, owner of the Afton House Inn, said she has seen only one lamp running.

Most of the eight lamps are in a park just outside the Old Village, but \$4,500 has been budgeted for expanding the igniter system to 10 more lamps by the beginning of next year, Welter said.

As for the temporarily added electric lights:

"They're not bad, but we would also like to see the gas lanterns available," Jarvis said. "We want more of a historic look, but they are better than the total dark."

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