



# City of Blair saving green by going green with street lights

BY DOUG BARBER

When was the last time you saw the cost of a government project actually go down?

Well, it happened with a cooperative pilot project between the City of Blair and Omaha Public Power District the cost of energy efficient light-emitting diode street light fixtures actually turned out to be lower than originally estimated. The result is that about 80 percent of the street lights in town will have the more efficient LED fixtures by this fall, which will save taxpayers money and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the fixtures.

Through a federal ARRA grant from the Nebraska State Energy Office, OPPD crews are replacing 589 of the older fixtures with the new LED fixtures. City officials had originally estimated that with the \$322,000 grant 345, or just under half of the city's 735 street lights could be replaced. But with the cost of each fixture lower than estimated, the grant

was amended to include 589, or about 85 percent of the city's light fixtures.

What's more, public works director Al Schoemaker estimates the city will recoup its \$80,000 investment in the project in less than two years with the savings from the more energy efficient fixtures.

"We figure it's always good if you can show a payback in five years," Schoemaker said. "The payback is going to be very, very short on this one."

Besides the money savings, Schoemaker estimates that the new LED fixtures also will save about 200,000 kilowatts of power, which translates into a reduction of about 315 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year.

Schoemaker said he liked to think of the project as having something for everybody.

"There's certainly something there for environmentalists with the reduced energy use and eliminated greenhouse gases," Schoemaker said. "And it certainly saves tax dollars and everybody likes to save money. Personally speaking, it's a win-win

for everybody."

The new LEDs should also provide a softer, whiter light as compared to the somewhat yellow cast of the older sodium fixtures.

In addition, Schoemaker said, "The LED is very directional. It's directed strictly to the road surface itself and will not be cast off on side streets and lawns, etc."

This is actually the second LED project for the city of Blair. All of the stoplights in the city were replaced with LED lights earlier. Schoemaker said that project has resulted in a reduction of about \$3,000 in energy costs for the stop lights in the first quarter of 2011, which means the city is looking at a payback of its \$50,000 investment in about four years.

One thing Schoemaker stressed is that the project does not include replacing the lights along the highways in town. Those are owned by the Nebraska Department of Roads, which has not yet approved the use of LED lighting.



**Phil Bloom of Omaha Public Power District installs one of the new LED fixtures in Deerfield last week, then checks to make sure it's working OK.**



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