

Lights out in Fresno? Council says no - Dark streetlights would be dangerous, critics say.

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Several Fresno City Council members have a message for Mayor Ashley Swarengin: Keep the **streetlights** on.

Swarengin proposed cutting power to 10,000 **streetlights** as part of her budget for Fiscal Year 2011, which begins July 1.

She said the affected **streetlights** -- 25% of those that the city operates -- would be strategically selected to minimize threats to public safety.

But a council majority on Tuesday clearly was in no mood to take a chance.

"Keeping the **streetlights** on is a fundamental core service," said Acting President Lee Brand, who was overseeing Tuesday's budget hearing in the absence of Council President Larry Westerlund. The council is "going to try to restore the lights."

Tuesday marked the second day of hearings on Swarengin's \$213 million general fund budget that proposes layoffs and service cuts to close a nearly \$31 million deficit projected through 2015.

Council members can make motions to amend Swarengin's proposed budget, but votes won't be held until the conclusion of the hearings. Motions that pass are subject to the mayor's veto. An override requires at least five council votes.

Public Works Director Patrick Wiemiller on Tuesday told the council that his staff, working with police and each council member, would try to shut off only **streetlights** in areas seldom used by people or where other street- lights can keep the areas illuminated.

Wiemiller said his staff had not yet selected which lights would go dark.

He said it would take a year to pull the plug on all 10,000 lights and the net savings in the next fiscal year, when many lights would be off for part of the year, would be about \$200,000. He said the savings in future years would be about \$400,000 because the 10,000 lights would be off for the entire 12 months.

Council Member Henry T. Perea led the opposition to Swearengin's proposal, making the first of what would be three council motions to restore funding for the 10,000 **streetlights**.

Perea did not identify a potential source for the \$200,000 necessary to keep the lights on.

Council Member Andreas Borgeas proposed taking the money from the Downtown and Community Revitalization Department's budget. The department's proposed FY 2011 budget is about \$2.6 million.

Brand suggested that if the council wouldn't support taking all \$200,000 from Downtown and Community Revitalization, he would support taking half that amount from the department to fund **streetlights**.

Both Perea and Council Member Cynthia Sterling balked at Wiemiller's proposal to brief council members in private on which lights would be turned off.

Sterling said many of her constituents have called her to express concern for their safety if selected neighborhood street- lights go dark.

Perea said the public must be informed before the lights go off so it can prepare for the potentially major change to their neighborhoods.

"I want to be briefed in public," Perea said.

City Manager Mark Scott after the hearing said he assumes that if one council member is briefed in public on the location of affected **streetlights**, then all seven council members would be briefed in public.

Budget hearings resume this morning with the parks and police departments.

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