

Spotlighting a problem

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A recent study of Elgin street lights shows newer subdivisions are adequately illuminated whereas older neighborhoods are sometimes left in the dark.

The city council commissioned the \$75,000 study last fall. Researchers visited each of the more than 5,200 street lights in Elgin and recorded their locations using a global positioning system.

The report recommends having a street light every 140 feet — a standard typically used in commercial developments. The city's current standard of 250 feet is adequate, however, said David Lawry, the city's general services manager.

Using the 250-foot rule, the city needs to install about 1,500 additional lights at a cost of about \$1.5 million. The additional energy and maintenance cost of the new lights would be about \$135,000 a year, Lawry said.

Staffers now are drawing up a plan to give to the council that addresses timelines, budget allocations and target areas, Lawry said.

Newer subdivisions — including Cobbler's Crossing, Randall Ridge, Columbine, College Green, Woodridge — all passed the 250-foot standard test.

But areas around Sherman Hospital, Wing Park, south of Chicago Street and west of the Fox River didn't measure up, Lawry said.

"That's where you see the areas that need the most attention right now if that 250-foot spacing is accepted," Lawry said. "At intersections in these areas, you can go from one intersection to the next and it gets dark until you get to the next intersection."

The explanation is simple: These neighborhoods did not have to meet the same standards when they were built, Lawry said.

The majority of the street lights in the areas with fewer lights also are owned by ComEd. The city pays the company for maintaining the lights.

Investing in new street lights could be worthwhile for council members. According to a study of lighting improvements in two communities — Dudley and Stoke-on-Trent in England — improved lighting reduced crime by more than 40 percent

And the savings from reduced crime exceeded the cost of the lighting improvements, the study said. Crime reductions saved 2.4 times the cost of the street lighting in Dudley and 10 times the cost of the lighting in Stoke-on-Trent, according to the national educational nonprofit National Crime Prevention Council.

Meanwhile, Elgin council members are expected to discuss the report and the best way to implement a plan to better light the city's older neighborhoods soon, Lawry said.

"Now we have to develop a plan to accomplish that goal," he said.