

LAS VEGAS REVIEW - JOURNAL

Council takes dim view of new streetlights



A man walks on First Street near Hoover Ave. on Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2013. Council members having second thoughts after city spends \$21 million on streetlights. (Jeff Scheid/Las Vegas R

Article here:

<http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/council-takes-dim-view-new-streetlightseview-Journal>



David Budd, 71, pushes a cart of pallets on First Street and Hoover Ave. on Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2013. Council members having second thoughts after city spends \$21 million on streetlights. (Jeff Scheid/Las Vegas Review-Journal)

By BENJAMIN SPILLMAN

Less than two years after launching a \$21 million effort to replace more than 40,000 streetlights in Las Vegas, Mayor Carolyn Goodman and others on the City Council are suffering buyers' remorse.

Dissatisfaction with new, LED streetlights that were pitched as a way to cut energy costs as much as \$2 million annually came to light during a recent council discussion about pedestrian safety.

Goodman was the first to throw shade on the new lights with a story about nearly running down a pedestrian while driving down Main Street.

“I almost hit somebody, and it was at 5:30 at night,” Goodman said. “I was almost right on top of that sidewalk and didn’t even see them.”

She pointed the finger of blame at the new streetlights, which she said didn’t provide as much visibility as the old ones.

“The lighting after dark, I think we are a disaster waiting to happen,” Goodman said.

She wasn’t the only one. Councilwoman Lois Tarkanian said she, too, thinks the new streetlights are inadequate, despite measurements suggesting the lights met municipal standards for brightness.

“We measured the light, and it seemed to be OK. But something is not OK,” Tarkanian said. “It has persisted since the very beginning since we started the LED lights.”

The streetlight backlash came during a discussion about a proposal from Councilman Ricki Barlow to approve lower speed limits from 45 mph to 35 mph on Martin Luther King Boulevard between Carey and Symphony Park avenues.

Barlow had been pressing for improvements to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in the wake of pedestrian deaths at separate intersections on Sept. 20 and Nov. 1.

“There is no way in my opinion that anyone should be hit in the crosswalk,” Barlow said. “There is something there we have to study.”

A review of federal data on pedestrian deaths from 2010 through 2012 shows a total of 11 incidents under “dark, lighted” conditions citywide.

There were a total of 33 pedestrian fatalities in the city in that time frame when daytime numbers are included.

Numbers for 2013 weren’t available.

In recent years, the city has spent millions of dollars to improve pedestrian safety.

One five-year, \$3.5 million effort underway includes improved lighting at crosswalks, curb extensions and pedestrian-operated flashers for crosswalks.

Earlier this year, the city and the Regional Transportation Commission announced they would spend \$1 million to obtain right-of-way easements on private property so bus shelters could be moved back from the street.

City workers also refresh crosswalks on school routes annually and changed the timing of lights in a pedestrian-heavy corridor downtown to improve safety.

Despite those efforts, there are still many places throughout the city where light poles and other obstacles block narrow sidewalks, forcing pedestrians into the street.

There are also many places where sidewalks end abruptly with no crosswalks or even curb cuts to make it easy and safe for pedestrians to continue walking.

While city staffers agreed to take another look at the streetlights and report back to the council, they also said they believe the lights are adequate and not the only factor in pedestrian safety.

City manager Betsy Fretwell said it will take longer than the two weeks council members allotted for studying the lights in order to review citywide safety efforts.

“I’ve asked that that work begin,” Fretwell said.

Councilman Bob Coffin seemed skeptical that any efforts would yield much in the way of results unless city officials are willing to make pedestrian safety a budget priority.

“You can’t replace, and you can’t restripe, and you can’t relight without money,” Coffin said.

“Let’s all remember we’ve sent them out there to do a job without enough money.”

Review-Journal reporter Brian Haynes contributed to this report. Contact Benjamin Spillman at bspillman@reviewjournal.com and follow him on Twitter at [@BenSpillman702](https://twitter.com/BenSpillman702).