

Oliver Baines: Now, about those dark streetlights

By Oliver
Baines

Streetlight outages will be an ongoing challenge as long as we have three things: streetlights, their parts that break down from wear and tear, and copper-wire thieves who are enticed by an accepting recycling market place and lax state legislation.

More than two years ago, when copper-wire thieves were darkening our streets, to respond to our constituents' frustrations, the Fresno City Council and the Public Works Department collaborated on a plan to install theft deterrents on our streetlights before they were vandalized and as they were repaired. This was a time when thieves were stealing wire faster than we could replace it, and Public Works was quoting six months to a year to fix a streetlight.

In May 2012, the City Council approved a \$520,000 Public Works plan to address the 26,000 remaining streetlights out of our total 42,000 lights that needed the theft deterrent, at \$20 per location. This initiative, lasting from May through June, saw a downturn in theft soon afterward, and Public Works was able to quote one to two months' time for a repair — a victory.

It has only been within the past two to three months that we are again noticing an increase in copper-wire theft and vandalism to our downtown vintage streetlights. This has caused the estimated repair time to increase from a one-to-two month waiting period to a three-month wait — still a far cry from the time when we had to quote a six-month to one-year wait.

Every light that goes out is a priority to be repaired; but as always, the rate at which we can repair lights is a factor of the number of lights in need of repair, versus the number of people on our work crews, versus the amount of work hours in the day.

We understand residents' concerns for lighting, especially now, as we are into the dark months of the year. Please know that we are diligently working to have the lights turned on as soon as possible. Also, please keep in mind that we will not know if a streetlight is out unless it is reported to us. Do not assume that your neighbor has called it in. The time that light went unreported could have been time spent moving up on the list.

To report streetlight outages, contact the One Call Center at (559) 621-CITY (2489). Please be ready to report the exact location of the street lights and/or the streetlight identification number.

Oliver Baines represents District 3 on the Fresno City Council.

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