

Supv. Dave de Felice (Dave day full-LEE-chay)
Dane County Board of Supervisors – Dist. 16
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“Golden Felice” (fleece) award goes to Zoo *\$100,000 for public lights for Zoo that closes at night?*

MADISON – Spending nearly \$100,000 in taxpayer dollars to light a portion of a public walkway at night for a county facility that closes at 5 p.m. doesn’t make sense, said Dane County Supv. Dave de Felice.

The spending was approved, 25-6, by the Dane County Board at its Oct. 1 meeting. Some 20 solar lights will be installed along part of the public walkways on the zoo grounds.

“I’m a strong supporter of alternative energy, but this is something else,” de Felice said. “This is about spending money wisely. This is money we have identified to save energy. If it’s going to be spent at all, I’d like to see it go to more deserving projects.”

The expenditure is particularly questionable because some of the zoo’s outside animal enclosures are closed to the public during the later months of the year, de Felice said.

The \$96,500 will come from an energy sustainability fund created to reduce the county’s carbon footprint. “This makes even less sense because we are creating a new waste stream of solar batteries and other materials,” de Felice said.

Supporters say the lighting will be useful for special events held after closing hours on the zoo grounds. According to zoo administrators, 17 special night events were held at the zoo in 2014.

However, that does not justify spending such a large amount of money, de Felice said. In addition, the lighting will be used for only about half of the walkway to the south. The northern part of the zoo walkway is covered with trees and foliage. Another question worth asking is how are the animals affected by artificial light at night?

“At nearly \$5,000 a light, this is not what I call a ‘bright’ idea,” de Felice.

Zoo administrators say they have no plans to extend regular zoo hours once the lighting is installed. The zoo is open 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. year round. On winter holidays, the zoo is open 9:30 a.m. to 12 noon.

Supv. de Felice’s award is named after the late Wisconsin U.S. Sen. William Proxmire’s “Golden Fleece,” which cited questionable spending. Supv. de Felice adopted the name of the award because his last name is frequently mispronounced “fleece.”