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Hoopeston council considers 18 percent water rate hike

The Hoopeston City Council is considering an 18 percent, across-the-board increase in water rates.

At Tuesday's meeting, Alderman Kevin Davis presented details on the planned hike, which is expected to be voted on at the June 18 meeting.

Davis is chairman of the water/sewer committee.

Under the proposal, the average user of 7,000 gallons per month would see his bill increase by 11.5. The bill for a low-consumption user of less than 1,000 gallons monthly would increase about 3.6 percent or 61 cents, Davis said.

Sewer rates are also expected to increase, from \$4.60 per unit to \$5.16.

The planned rate hike will affect residential and commercial customers except Hoopeston Foods, Inc. Davis said the city has a contract with the company for its wastewater. After Alderman Bill Goodwine said the contract had never been approved by the city council, Davis said he would look into the issue.

The proposed increases will generate \$100,000 if all users pay their bills. "We're at the mercy of the public," Davis said.

The additional money generated will be used to repay a loan to the city's general fund and eventually help the city with a water department maintenance program. Davis said water mains are not flushed regularly due to a lack of manpower and that infrastructure work is also needed. "We've been doing a patch job for 15 years," he said.

Besides the current increase under consideration, Davis said he plans to propose a 1.5 increase annually for the next 10 years to cover inflation.

The last water rate increase was in 1986, Davis said, adding a \$3 surcharge was imposed on water bills about six years ago.

"It's not something you want to do but you've got to look down the road," said Mayor Chalmers Flint.

Alderman John Haughee noted that several corporate water customers have either closed or decreased usage, affecting income to the water/sewer fund.

In other business, the council:

- approved July 5 as a paid holiday for city workers.
- Alderman Bill Goodwine, who suggested the extra day off, said it is a "token of appreciation" to employees, but noted the day off "doesn't make up for" a wage freeze.
- approved purchasing a mower for \$5,839 from Birkey's. The mower is for the cemetery department.
- approved purchasing a new police car through the state bidding pool. The purchase was moved up after the car which was slated to be traded in was totaled in an accident recently.
- heard a proposal from Robert Davis of Watseka about a city web page at a cost of more than \$22,000 for three years.

Former resident charged with taping in gas station bathroom

A former Hoopeston resident is free on bond after he was charged with illegally videotaping activity in a women's restroom.

Richard Dobkins, 49, was charged with unlawful videotaping for setting up a camera in the women's room of the Paxton Marathon gas station. Dobkins is the station owner.

According to reports, the camera was still recording when officers came to the station. Approximately 30 tapes were also found.

If convicted, Dobkins faces up to two years in jail and a \$2,500 fine.

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charged with illegal transportation of alcohol. Matthe M. Hofer, 18, of 528 W. Elm and a 16-year-old boy were charged with purchase/acceptance of alcohol by a minor.

Police reported citizen complaints of a vehicle driving in the downtown area in which those arrested were allegedly throwing empty beer bottles at pedestrians.

Each was released on a notice to appear.