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City manager to recommend immediate 17.5 percent combined water and sewer increase



City Manager Robert Layton will recommend that the city hike its water and sewer rates by combined 17.5 percent this year, 16 percent in 2011 and smaller increases every year through 2018.

That's based on recommendations by HDR Engineering, Inc, which proposed slowing down the city's \$550 million aquifer recharge project to put off about \$35.8 million in expenses. The suggested increases would also require the city to put off about \$2.6 million a year in water and sewer improvement projects.

The actual water hike will be decided by the city council, most likely on June 15. The hike would be effective July 1.

HDR also suggested that industries use reclaim water, the city rely more on water from Cheney Reservoir and consider using reserve osmosis to purify high water flows on the Arkansas River.

But HRD's Don Lindeman said the city should continue the aquifer recharge work it put on hold earlier this year after it realized its dire financial future.

"It just doesn't make sense to stop work on those and put those on hold," he said.

HDR began its work in mid-April after the city council approved \$185,000 agreement.

The basics of the city's water finance problem is that it's in the midst of a \$550 million Equus Beds Aquifer storage and recovery project at a time when consumption has declined because of consumer conservation and several rainy years in a row.

Miscalculations on financing the project and unusually high spending on a sewer line expansion program made it worse.

Those factors led City Manager Robert Layton to call for a 15 percent rate increase starting June 1 to prevent the city from facing a credit rating downgrade that could cost taxpayers millions.

By Brent Wistrom

Posted at An hour and 36 minutes ago Filed under Uncategorized

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