

Community to pay morefor utilities

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 28 January 2010 00:38 - Last Updated Thursday, 28 January 2010 13:30

City Council passes electricity, water hikes.

An increase in electricity and water rates will be reflected on customer bills in February.

Gothenburg City Council members, at their meeting Jan. 19, passed a utility rate ordinance that includes an overall rise of 6.5% in electrical rates with a dollar added to monthly water bills.

The council waived three readings of the proposal and passed it on second reading to accommodate the city billing schedule.

Council president Jeff Kennedy said that was all right with him because he hadn't heard much, if any, discussion from the public about the proposal.

City administrator Bruce Clymer said the city's wholesale power supplier—Nebraska Public Power District—is raising rates an average of 4.9%.

However he said equipment needs to be replaced and noted that Gothenburg's electrical rates are low when compared to other cities its size.

A cost-of-service study by the Nebraska Municipal Power Pool recommended the increase.

When separated from the rest of the utilities, Clymer said both the water and sewer department operated at a deficit in 2009.

Under the new water law, costs for customers using three-quarter-inch water pipes—the size of most lines in Gothenburg—will increase a dollar, from \$14.70 to \$15.70 a month.

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Users of larger sizes of pipes will also pay \$1 more monthly.

In other action, the council passed the annual one-and six-year road plan following a public hearing at which no one from the public spoke.

Clymer said the plan was basically the same one passed last year but the paving of 22nd and 23rd Streets has been removed.

Those projects were completed in 2009.

A transportation study is in the one-year plan.

Added to the six-year plan, which is available for viewing at city hall, include the milling and re-blacktopping of Avenue M between 17th and 27th streets; on 27th Street between Lake Avenue and Avenue M and 12th Street from avenues I to L.

Clymer said a road east of Cottonwood Drive, that had been planned for an ethanol plant, will remain in the plan in case another industry locates in Gothenburg.

Council member Jim Aden said Avenue L by the airport was horrible.

Clymer said he'd like see all of the resurfacing projects done at once, through bonds, to get a more economical price since estimated costs for a block of resurfacing is between \$20,000 and \$25,000.

"But I don't know if the city can jump off that cliff," he said.

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Paving in the 11th and 10th street area between avenues I and L could perhaps be completed with help from a Department of Economic Development grant, Clymer said.

Aden said he'd like to see the city "bite off chunks each year."

"If we put it on the one- to six-year plan we can bump projects up to do," Clymer said. "Maybe during budget time we can seriously look at the blacktop roads."

Council president Jeff Kennedy asked if there are things like sewer or water that need to be corrected before paving or blacktop projects are started.

City services director Shane Gruber said everything underneath what was covered in the plan, like sewer, was in good shape.

However Gruber noted that a water main on 11th Street is in bad condition.

"Before we pave the rest of 11th Street, we'll want to replace the water main," Gruber said.

On another matter, members gave Kennedy the go ahead to proceed with landscaping and lighting around a community entrance sign on the south edge of town.

Kennedy, who owns and operates Kennedy Landscape Services, submitted a \$9,400 proposal to plant trees and plants and provide mulch, irrigation and lighting.

Kennedy said he tried to keep the plan simple and chose plants with color. He said the Tree Board may plant trees there to commemorate Arbor Day.

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Council members also discussed lettering, which was sanded over, on a new stone sign at the south entrance to town.

Letters are still visible even though original etching on the directional sign was covered up when city officials thought it too small for passersby to read.

The stone was later re-engraved.

“If it doesn’t cure, we’ll have to look at an alternative,” Clymer said. “I think we still need to do something.”

Kennedy said he’d like to start on the landscaping project in the spring. Council members discussed whether fixing the sign could interfere with landscaping if a truck is needed. No decision was made.

In other business, the council:

- passed on first reading an ordinance which adopts general licensing provisions dealing with alcoholic beverages that are consistent with existing city code. The proposal also includes the establishment of \$100 fee for an alcohol catering license.
- considered and approved Reynolds Subdivision plat, at the request of property owner Gary Reynolds, located along Avenue L and between Jefferson and Washington Streets. Clymer said Reynolds wants four lots, including the one where his home is located in an area that was never subdivided.
- approved the draw down of \$184,813 in Community Development Block Grant funds to pay for 22nd and 23rd Street paving improvements.
- agreed to pay \$1,500 to Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers for preparing 2008 street improvement assessments.
- learned that city attorney Mike Bacon and police officer Ryan Randolph attended a public hearing in Lincoln in support of LB 688, a bill that allows boats and campers to be included in property, like vehicles, that must be licensed in cities.

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