



Will Peoria be known as the rain barrel city?

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Posted Mar 25, 2018 at 6:33 PM

Updated Mar 25, 2018 at 8:32 PM

PEORIA — Maybe Peoria will become known as the rain barrel city. Peoria City Council members will hear about rain barrels along with other ways to manage water when they get their first look at the credit manual for the city's stormwater utility tax at Tuesday's council meeting.

The use of a rain barrel to collect water is just one of the ways that residents and businesses can save money on monthly stormwater utility bills that are due to go out this June.

Public Works Director Scott Reise will unveil various things residents can do to capture rainfall that will qualify for credits and grants.

The city established the stormwater utility in December to raise funds to handle a backlog of \$17.5 million in stormwater projects as well as laying the groundwork for a fix to the city Combined Sewers Overflow problem.

The CSO project is Peoria's proposed response to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the federal department that has charged the city with keeping sewage out of the Illinois River. During periods of heavy rainfall, overloaded sewer lines empty directly into the river instead of going to the sewage treatment plant.

The utility tax is based on a charge of \$3 for 1,000 square feet of impervious area such as a roof or driveway. A city resident with an average-sized home can expect to pay \$8 a month, said Reise.

A number of area companies have complained to council members that the new tax targets businesses, especially those with extensive parking lots. Jimmy Scherer, who owns Scherer Mazda, 2300 W. Pioneer Parkway, is one of the area

business people who's raised the issue. He said he faces an annual bill of \$4,400 minus credits that could save from \$500 to \$1,000. An adjoining new car lot faces an annual \$5,000 tab, said Scherer.

Those credits and grants along with application fees will be spelled out by Reise on Tuesday. The city plans to cover the cost of two rain barrels, up to \$50 each, while rain gardens, detention basins and the installation of permeable pavers also will qualify for discounts on stormwater utility fees.

Council members also will hear about an increase in sewer rates. Residents living south of War Memorial Drive will see a quarterly bill of \$58.41 rise to \$60.17, a 3 percent increase, while those living north of War Memorial will see a quarterly bill of \$64.45 go to \$65.36, a 1.4 percent hike.

Also on Tuesday's agenda: an ordinance regarding signage, the first reading of an ordinance that would raise the age to buy tobacco in Peoria from 18 to 21 and the approval of a policy session on the need for more affordable housing in Peoria. At that policy session, held March 10, Community Development Director Ross Black noted that 62 percent of households in Peoria County spend more than a third of their income on housing.

In what is probably the final formality before its grand opening in April, the Portillo's restaurant under construction on Rockwood Drive seeks city approval Tuesday to sell beer and wine along with the hot dogs and Italian beef sandwiches.

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