



Questions rain down on Peoria officials over stormwater utility tax

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PEORIA — It wasn't just the promise of spring that prompted so many questions on lawns and gardens from the 40 people that gathered at Illinois Central College Peoria Campus on Thursday evening.

Most were there to better understand the stormwater utility tax looming over homeowners, businesses, churches, schools and just about anyone with property that captures rainfall in Peoria.

That tax starts June 1, but homeowners may not see a bill until July or August, depending on what part of the city they live in, said Andrea Klopfenstein, a project engineer with the city. The city has stated that the average homeowner will pay about \$8 a month and be billed quarterly.

The reason for the new fee is to reduce water runoff while allowing Peoria to better manage stormwater issues across the city where some 400 projects that involve sinkholes, erosion problems and aging culverts are backlogged, she said.

Then there's the Combined Sewer Overflow issue, an ongoing matter of concern between the city and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said Klopfenstein. While the price tag to keep stormwater from overwhelming the city's sewers and dumping sewage into the Illinois River hasn't been finalized yet, the estimate is that it will cost the city between \$200 million and \$250 million, she said.

Public Works Director Scott Reeise was optimistic that negotiations between city and EPA officials could be completed in the near future. "We're hopeful that we can get a deal done with the Trump EPA that will stand for 18 years," he said, referring to the time estimated for the city to fund a CSO solution.

Klopfenstein said installation of environmental-friendly property features, such as permeable pavement or rain gardens, could reduce fees. She outlined ways that residents can reduce the utility fee through credits and grants. Measures range from the reimbursement for the purchase of two rain barrels to competitive grants for major engineering projects that the city will fund up to \$100,000.

To receive a credit or grant, residents must fill out a form and pay an application fee, she said. “We want the credits to be user friendly and easy to get. The idea is to promote change and improve the city,” said Klopfenstein.

Residents can find out what their bill will be in advance in early May through a website, OneWaterPeoria.com. Klopfenstein added that the city will hold another informational meeting at 11 a.m. April 27 at the Peoria Public Library at 107 NE Monroe St.

Audience questions included why the utility tax couldn't be added to the property tax bill. Klopfenstein said that was being looked into. The possibility of including it on a property owner's water bill is also being explored.

Peorian Robin Grantham asked if the utility fees would go toward paying the fine the EPA might levy. Klopfenstein said that was an issue that the Peoria City Council would have to determine. Peoria council members will take up approval of the credit manual at the group's May 8 meeting, the city's project engineer said.

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