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Wednesday, January 21, 2004

Storm water fee on hold

By **Vanessa Miller**
Iowa City Press-Citizen

With Iowa City councilors poised to give final approval of a storm water management fee that could add more than \$500 to the monthly bills of large companies, officials with the Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce Tuesday night asked them to wait.

Members of the chamber are concerned that the new fee will impact negatively economic development in Iowa City and are working to prepare an alternative to the proposal - something city councilors are anxious to hear.

As proposed, the fee would cost residents \$2 a month, and non-residential entities including grocery stores, gas stations, industrial plants and schools \$1 per 3,129-square-foot - the size of an average home.

That would mean an additional \$531 on Procter & Gamble's monthly water bill, \$206 on City High's water bill and \$140 on Menard's bill.

In Coralville and North Liberty, companies in buildings that are the same size or larger would pay only \$2 a month.

City Attorney Eleanor Dilkes said a flat fee, as imposed in Iowa City's neighboring communities, is illegal and advised councilors against adopting a similar fee structure. That left the council to determine the fee on building size, something officials are worried will deter companies from moving to Iowa City.

"In the interest of strengthening local government policy to meet the needs of business, industry and its citizenry, we strongly encourage the city of Iowa City to work in partnership with the Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce to determine an equitable sewer management fee structure for commercial and industrial property owners," said Joe Raso, president for the Iowa City Area Development Group, in a Jan. 19 letter to Mayor [Ernie Lehman](#).

Pat Guard, Chamber of Commerce president, said the chamber's goal is to create a fee structure that allows Iowa City to remain competitive with neighboring communities, while generating enough money to pay for needed improvements to treat runoff that flows into city storm drains.

City officials estimate the cost of those improvements at \$915,600 a year when combined with existing operating expenses. A \$2 fee for non-residential customers would have generated more than that amount, \$916,496. The proposed \$1 fee generates \$739,000.

The council will wait for the chamber's proposed alternative, and vote on the storm water fee during its Feb. 3 meeting.

- In other council business, a City Council majority voted to set a public hearing on the sale of \$7.3 million in bonds to help fund the Plaza Towers project.

The \$27 million project will erect two 14-story towers providing hotel suites, apartments, condominiums, a conference center and commercial space on one acre at the southwest corner of Linn and College streets.

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