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## Controversial storm water issue on San Angelo City Council agenda for Tuesday

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The San Angelo City Council is in for a long discussion on its storm water management plan and storm water utility fees.

The storm water issue and other budget discussions are among just a handful of items on the council's Tuesday agenda, but it promises to be a long discussion. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. at the McNease Convention Center.

The city is required to fund a program to meet federal regulations to protect storm water quality in smaller cities. Under the Phase II Storm Water Program, San Angelo is one of several hundred cities and other public entities required to develop a program to protect storm water quality, City Manager Harold Dominguez wrote in a column that will run in Tuesday's Standard-Times.

The city must perform additional services to comply with these regulations, which are unfunded, Dominguez said. The city's Storm Water Management Plan will include cleaning and maintaining drainage channels, stricter regulation of new development, increasing street sweeping, creating water quality educational programs, repairing and maintaining storm sewer systems and providing for household hazardous waste disposal, according to Dominguez.

The city must hire about 14 additional staff including inspectors, equipment operators, laborers and engineers to comply with this requirement, according to Dominguez.

"Most pollutants come from urban debris on the roadway," said Elizabeth Grindstaff, assistant city manager. "We have to manage the storm water runoff and meet a quality standard."

The annual budget for the Storm Water Management plan is \$2.9 million.

The city staff has proposed a storm water utility fee to every water bill for residents, businesses and others to fund the federal requirement. The city would use an alternative billing procedures for properties that do not have water service and therefore don't receive a water bill, according to Dominguez.

This fee, which has not yet been determined, would be dedicated to pay for storm water management in San Angelo.

The council will consider a rate structure based on the amount of rain water that runs off the property instead of soaking into the ground. Roofs, parking lots and driveways, called impervious areas, all increase the amount of storm water runoff from a property and will be factored into the rate each property would pay, according to Dominguez.

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Average storm water utility fees in Texas cost 15 cents per 100 square feet of impervious area per month, he said. Residents and businesses in most U.S. cities with more than 100,000 people have been paying these fees for more than 10 years, and many smaller cities in Texas adopted storm water utility fees over the past decade in anticipation of the federal mandate, he said.

Council member Dwain Morrison said Monday he doesn't think the city can afford a new program with a \$2.9 million budget. He said he wants to hear the staff's presentation, but said the current proposal could be a "death sentence" to some local businesses.

He said the economic climate was much different when the EPA first issued the regulations.

"We can possibly comply to the limit we are able to comply, but I don't feel with the economic situation the way it is, we can comply to the level of \$2.9 million," he said. "We have businesses that are just hanging on by their toenails and this situation could push them over the edge. I don't see there is any way in the world we can afford it."

San Angelo faces potential penalties of up to \$25,000 per day if it does not comply with this requirement.

Dominguez said.

One proposed fee structure is divided into residential and commercial categories. The proposed residential category is divided into four tiers based on the square footage of the residential building structures.

\* Tier 1 Total Area less than 1,000 square feet

\* Tier 2 Total Area 1,000 1,999 square feet

\* Tier 3 Total Area 2,000 2,999 square feet

\* Tier 4 Total Area 3,000 square feet and greater

A commercial category fee proposal is based on total impervious surface, which is hard surfaces such as roof tops and parking lots. A flat rate is charged per square foot of impervious surface.

The proposed fee structure distributes the fee equally among residents and commercial business, according to the city. Though the method of assessing the fee for the two categories is different, both residents and commercial business pay the same flat rate based on total impervious surface, according to the city.

"What we need out of Tuesday's meeting is a pretty strong consensus from the council as to what they are comfortable with on the rates in particular knowing how much money we need to generate and how much that is broken down between residential and commercial properties," Grindstaff said.

"The council is going to have to determine what they think is the fairest and most equitable way to generate the budget necessary."