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# City Council to meet today; may try to override veto on sewer rate increase

Mar. 10, 2014 | 4 Comments

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The Hattiesburg City Council is expected today to try and override the veto of an amended ordinance that would have raised sewer rates to pay for the creation and operation of mandated wastewater treatment plant.

The council has called a 5:30 p.m. meeting at City Hall, where it is expected to consider executive session to hear from attorneys regarding the lawsuit brought by an environmental group, Gulf Restoration Network.

The city is under a timeline delineated by the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality to create a wastewater system that will stop polluted discharge from entering the Leaf River.

In January, Council voted 4-1 to contract for 30 years with Hattiesburg-based Groundworx, LLC, to create and operate a land-application wastewater treatment system. The contract calls for Groundworx to issue bonds to build the system that is expected to cost an initial \$142 million.

Council voted 3-2 in February to amend an ordinance that would mean steep sewage rate hikes beginning in April and continuing annually for the next four fiscal years. The higher rates would allow the city to immediately meet bond obligations, whittling down the amount of interest paid over the life of the bonds.

DuPree on Feb. 27, Mayor Johnny DuPree vetoed the amended ordinance, saying that the new rates needed to be mitigated by some source of addition revenue, thereby lessening the impact of the higher bills residents will be required to pay.

DuPree called for the Council's support of an initiative that could

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potentially be put before Hattiesburg voters to raise the municipal sales tax by 1 percent on selected items. DuPree said that such a tax could a minimally-estimated \$10 million annually.

The Council voted 5-0 to ask state legislators to pass a Local and Private bill that would permit such a referendum.

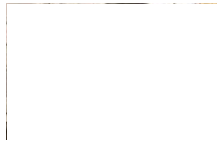
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