



Committee Split Over Water, Sewer Connection Fee

By [John L. Moore](#)

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ROGERS -- Some members of an ad hoc committee for the Rogers Water and Sewer Commission said connection fees approved in December were necessary based on the large capital improvement needed over the next 10 years.

Others said the city of Rogers should continue to look at other alternatives, such as taking on more debt.

The committee was formed after some developers and representatives of the Northwest Arkansas Home Builders Association expressed disapproval of increasing connection fees in the city to help cover the cost of infrastructure improvement driven by growth.

That includes expansion of the wastewater treatment plant, new storage tanks and purchase of Bentonville's portion of two water transmission lines the two cities share.

The total cost could top \$100 million in the next 10 years, according to staff members of Rogers Water Utilities.

Taking on more debt to fund the improvement would still mean the utility has to increase revenue in some way, said Jerry Carmichael, a member of the commission.

Rates will increase, but the rate increases may be less if connection fees are used, Tom McAlister, superintendent of the utility, said.

Randy Hill, a house builder in Rogers, said he thought the fees were needed and would have to agree to disagree with developer Charles Reaves and house builder Lance Johnson.

Both Johnson and Reaves have argued that impact fees could slow residential building growth.

Reaves said the issue is one of economic development and whether the city wants to slow the rate of growth.

Reaves also said the commission should strongly consider moving to the regional wastewater treatment plant proposed by the Northwest Arkansas Conservation Authority and putting as little money into the existing Rogers plant as possible.

Growth may continue, but it may be slower than what it could be if the fees weren't in place, Reaves explained.

Raymond Burns, chairman of the Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce, asked whether anyone had considered the potential impact on commercial development, especially retail growth.

The committee has debated the issue for the past three weeks and some members on Monday seemed ready to hear a new alternative or move forward with a recommendation to the commission next week.

That recommendation could be to phase in the \$2,200 sewer connection fees and \$700 water connection fee over a period of a few years, do away with the fees altogether or leave the fees at the same levels as approved in December.

In addition to the sewer and water connection fees, the commission approved a \$150 increase in access fees for water and a \$150 increase for sewer. Those fees are scheduled to go into effect at the beginning of April.