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AmerenIP tops Urbana council's agenda

By Mike Monson

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URBANA – The city council is expected to vote Monday to join Champaign in intervening in AmerenIP's request for an electric rate increase.

Mayor Laurel Prussing said the city will vote on a resolution to intervene in the rate case, now before the Illinois Commerce Commission, and to budget \$16,700 to help pay for the costs of intervention.

The council meets at 7 p.m. Monday at the Urbana City Building, 400 S. Vine St.

Ameren is seeking an increase in its delivery service rates for electricity and natural gas. Delivery service normally makes up about 30 percent of the overall bill and represents Ameren's cost of delivering natural gas or electricity to the customer.

Prussing said the proposed increase will raise the cost of providing street lighting considerably.

"For the city budget, we have a big expense in streetlights," she said. "(Public Works Director) Bill Gray's estimate was this could cost us \$100,000 more per year. That's a huge increase for us."

The city of Champaign intervened in the electric delivery service rate case in December and is now coordinating getting other Central Illinois cities to join them and share in the costs of hiring consultants, industry experts and attorneys,

Besides Urbana, Champaign is trying to get Bloomington, Normal, Peoria and Decatur to participate in the case and share costs, estimated at \$89,000.

The cities will focus on the street lighting aspects of the case that affect them directly. Champaign officials said consumers' interests are being well-represented by the Illinois Attorney General's office and the Citizens Utility Board.

For homeowners, AmerenIP is asking for a 13.6 percent overall increase in electric rates, to be phased in over two years, and a 11.2 percent overall increase in natural gas rates.

Prussing said she has been disappointed with the decisions of the Illinois Commerce Commission in recent years on rate cases.

"The Illinois Commerce Commission has a reputation of always siding with the utilities," she said. "It really does seem the ICC is not doing the job they were set up to do."

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