

Water plant may expand to meet higher demand

By Julie Finelli — Daily Correspondent | Wednesday, October 1, 2008 11:31 AM CDT

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The Ames water utility is in the process of planning an expansion project of the treatment plant in order to keep Ames afloat.

In an open house Tuesday, water plant employees outlined the options for the water plant expansion project. The open house was the first of four that the Water and Pollution Control Department plans to have in order to get input from Ames residents.

Because of aging infrastructure, deterioration of existing units of the plant, and increased demand for water in Ames, the Water and Pollution Control Department is currently trying to find ways to improve the system, said John Dunn, the director of the Ames Water and Pollution Control Department, during the open house.

While the plant's current rated capacity is 12 million gallons per day, a new single-day peak demand record of more than 10 million gallons per day was made during the summer of 2007, according to a Water and Pollution Control Department document. The document also states that the demand is projected to exceed 12 million gallons per day, so changes need to be made.

The first step of the expansion includes deciding between modernizing the current facilities or starting fresh with a completely new treatment facility. Since the process is just beginning, all possible impacts are being considered, to decide the best long range solution.

"The best long range solution may or may not be the least expensive option," Dunn said.

The department also explained that funding for the expansion will come entirely from utility customer charges, not from taxes.

"Ames has a philosophy of giving the best service at the best price," Dunn said. In order to do this, they are encouraging residents of Ames to step forward and give their input.

Currently, the water plant is being evaluated by FOX Engineering, Inc., 1601 Golden Aspen Drive, in conjunction with two other engineering firms, HDR Engineering of Omaha, Neb., and Barr Engineering of Minneapolis, Minn., to decide what steps need to be taken.

After the evaluation of the current conditions, they will identify the city's water demands, quality and possible treatment technologies, followed by analyzing the treatment alternative options, according to a water treatment plant document, titled Work Plan Overview.

Several factors might affect the plan of expansion, said Phil Propes, superintendent of the water plant, including the water conservation efforts of the people of Ames. Smart Water, the water conservation plan that was established in summer 2007, aims to curb excessive water use during peak usage times.

Propes said it is difficult to tell how effective Smart Water has been after only a year because of the excessive amount of rain.

Renovations to the plant have occurred regularly, about every 15 to 20 years, since the construction of the existing plant in 1927. The last renovations of the water plant happened in 1988.

"So here we are, 10 to 20 years. We're actually right on schedule to be looking at this again," Dunn said.

The open house was the first of four that the Water and Pollution Control Department plans to have in order to get input from Ames residents. The next public meeting will occur when the water demands have been determined and will summarize the evaluations.



Larry Chase, a resident of Ames, discusses with Mike Dodds, a maintenance worker at the local water treatment plant, and Scott Routh, an operator at the treatment plant, about the current system in place for water treatment. Larry is uncertain about whether the city should revamp and modernize the current water plant or start over with a completely new water treatment plant. The City of Ames had an open house for their Water Plant Expansion Project at the Ames Public Library on Tuesday, Sept 30, 2008. Photo: David Derong/Iowa State Daily