

Water rates on rise in Wichita; courses may pay double

By Hal Phillips

WICHITA, Kan. — Area golf courses will pay double for water following the city's passage of a new water rate structure. Golf course managers feel particularly hard hit by the measure, but their pleas have gone unheeded.

After meeting with a dozen disgruntled course representatives, the Wichita City Council is mulling a plan that would phase in the higher rates for golf courses, giving them time to phase in grasses that require less water.

But the council has yet to move on the

Area representatives fighting controversial rate structure

subject, and course managers are preparing for the worst.

"We can't take this kind of hit and stay in business," John Wright told the *Wichita Eagle*. Wright manages the Reflection Ridge golf course. "It's going to bankrupt some of us."

The City Council passed the new water rate structure in January. It's designed to reward customers who use less water and penalize those who use more. Because the new pay scale is based on volume, golf course

managers feel singled out.

Higher interim rates go into effect May 1, and even higher rates are scheduled to take hold Jan. 1, 1993.

The average golf course in Wichita uses about 58 million gallons a year and pays about \$58,000. Under the new rates, that same course would pay about \$129,000 a year for water — an increase of 129 percent.

Most area courses feature rye and bluegrass, which are easy to maintain but require a lot of water. More economical choices would

include Bermuda or zoysia, but to plant new grass would "cost anywhere from \$500,000 to \$1 million per course including labor, excavating, plant material and water use rates," said Wright.

Bill Oliver, greens chairman for Wichita Country Club, says the clubs are willing to cooperate on conservation, but "most courses were told that it would be at least five years before any substantial (rate) increases," he told the *Eagle*.

Oliver believes players will see more expensive greens fees when the higher rates go into effect in January. "You've got to make up for that cost somewhere," he said.

Voters to decide fate of Pleasure Island project

PORT ARTHUR, Texas — The controversial proposal to build an 18-hole golf course on Pleasure Island will be validated or shot down at the polls.

A small group of residents seeking a chance to vote on the proposal has mustered enough support to force city officials to place the project on the May 2 ballot.

The question is not so much opposition to the proposed course site. It's more a question of how to pay for it. The City Council voted last December to release \$8.95 million in certificates of obligation to build the course.

Petitioners want a citywide vote on whether to release the \$8.95 million.

City officials believe revenues from the course and lot sales on the island will pay back the certificates.

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