DAVISON — Typical Davison water and sewer users can expect their monthly bills to rise nearly $17 a month beginning in March. To soften the blow on utility users from earlier projections, the City Council on Jan. 25 decided to use general fund money to pay about $125,000 in annual administrative costs for water and sewer operations. Mayor Fred (Mac) Fortner said if a resident uses 3,000 gallons of water a month, the monthly bill would spike to $38.50.

City Manager Dale Martin said the typical user consumes 3,000 to 6,000 gallons of water a month, which also is used as a benchmark for determining the sewer bill. Davison uses wells to supply water to residents but contracts with Genesee County for sanitary sewage treatment.

The hikes were introduced in October to meet rising operation costs. The administration’s recommendation of new rates, which had input from the Michigan Rural Water Association, had put the new minimum water rate at $23.42 a month and sewer rates at $23.32. The adopted rate is $22.45 for water and $22.03 for sewage.

Former Councilman Ron Emery, who was defeated for re-election in the November election, told the council it was making a dangerous move in shifting water and sewer costs to the general fund with the city facing reduced income for its next budget.

“You think you are doing a good thing for residents by saving them a couple of bucks a month, but I think you are putting an undue amount of pressure on the general fund,” Emery said.

“I believe it’s gone way too far,” asserted Councilman Don Csutoras, who voted against the new formula. “You are putting too much of a burden on the general fund. I still don’t think it’s an equitable decision.”

The move, however, could cost the Department of Public Works director his job. Mayor Pro Tem Tim Bishop, who cast the other dissenting vote, said the new recommendation was devised by a committee made up of councilmen opposed to the administration’s proposals and who felt that the DPW director’s position should be eliminated.

He charged that a majority of the committee had no background in municipal budgets and had no water and sewer experience.

“A committee,” Bishop said, “that decided not to make the logical increase but one that will see the city’s checkbook drained of nearly a quarter of a million dollars this year by transferring wages from the water and sewer funds to the general fund.”

Councilman Roger Lutze, who served on the committee, said he felt a percentage of the wages could be spread over other areas of the budget.

Resident Howard Johnson told the council it should draft its budget based on what people can afford to pay.

“We’re concerned that you operate the city on what the people can afford,” he said.

Brian Klaassen, 39, Davison DPW director since November 2006, indicated he would not go quietly. Klaassen said he planned to consult with his attorney to take legal steps if his job is eliminated.

Klaassen, who is paid about $64,000 annually, heads a nine-member department that maintains 13 miles of major streets and 17 miles of local roads and is responsible for the city’s water and sewer systems, parks and building maintenance and snow and leaf removal.

A graduate of Walsh College with a degree in business administration, he was employed by the Madison Heights DPW before being named from a field of 27 candidates for the Davison post.

Martin said the council would be shortsighted if it eliminates Klaassen’s post.