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Impact fees one step closer

Commissioners to review potential numbers

08/31/05

Randall Franks

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.... Catoosa County commissioners will learn the maximum impact fees the county could charge developers on September 6.

Impact fees are charged to developers to offset the costs of infrastructure (roads, sewers, and water) required by the development.

"It's been a long time in the making," said Don Hutelin, Catoosa County Impact Fee Advisory Committee chairman. "We are finally getting down to the nitty gritty."

Hutelin stressed August 30 at a committee meeting at the Catoosa Courthouse that the impact fee methodology report is simply a draft that reflects the maximum amount that the county can charge subject to the approval of the Board of Commissioners.

Bill Ross, Jr. of Ross and Associates, a consulting firm conducting the \$118,000 study on the feasibility of impact fees, presented the report to the advisory committee.

The committee, which is required under state law, includes a builder, developer and real estate agent, while residents fill the

remaining positions. Other members are Jerry Hawthorne, Eddie Floyd, Sherman Smith, Ron McKelvy, Emory White and Marilyn Helms.

Ross told the committee that the fee numbers reflect the maximum allowable impact at the level of service the county desires to deliver.

"Everything can change," he said. "The level of service is up to the Board of Commissioners."

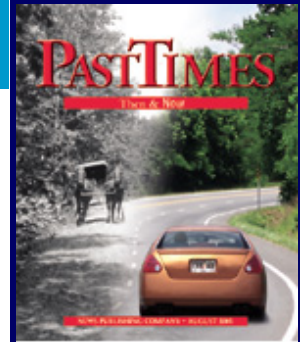
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Ross highlighted the areas that the county could collect fees to support. These areas include library; detention facilities, sheriff's office, 911 emergency communications, parks and recreation, road improvements and sewer system facilities.

He reminded committee members that governments may use monies collected for capital facilities or infrastructure that have a life of at least 10 years.

The county intends to continue providing library service at the same level it currently maintains until the year 2030, he said. Currently through its support of the Northwest Georgia Regional Library System, the county provides 21,243 square feet of library with 87,000 volumes of collection material (books, videos, CDs) for 24,973 houses or apartments, according to the report.

The report projects there will be 24,364 dwelling units in the county by 2030. In order to provide the same level of service the county will have to add another 21,000 square feet of library and an additional 84,879 volumes of collection materials, Ross said. The county's contribution to meet these needs will require \$5,525,595 requiring the county to charge a maximum library impact fee of \$224.57 per single family dwelling, apartment, or condominium, he said.

Possible residential and commercial fees

A maximum possible fee for a single family detached house could be \$1,347. In addition to the library portion this fee includes \$272.81 for parks and recreation; \$119.82 for the jail; \$89.45 for the sheriff's office; \$585.55 for roads and 95 cents for 911 communications. There is also a \$38.79 fee for administration and \$15.06 fee to recoup the cost of preparing the capital improvements element of the report. The fees for apartments and condominiums vary, being slightly lower at \$1,164 per apartment and \$1,114 per condominium.

Committee member Eddie Floyd, manager with Coldwell Banker Kinard Realty, said impact fees are necessary to keep the county from going backwards.

"It is going to be hard for a lot of the public to swallow," she said. "But after it's implemented and they are use to it, I think they are not going to remember when it wasn't there."

Commercial developers could take the hardest hit if the county implements the maximum fees. For instance, if a new fast food restaurant is built, that developer could pay a \$18,395.63 impact fee per 1,000 square feet; a convenience store with gasoline could pay a \$21,973.43 impact fee per 1,000 square feet; a home improvement superstore such as Home Depot could pay \$1,793.56 per 1,000 square feet; a drive-in bank could pay \$10,800.94 per 1,000 square feet.

"If a business can't afford these additional fees then they are probably not going to make it anyway," Floyd said.

"If it adds a nickel to a Coke or a cup of coffee, people are not going to cross the street to get it somewhere that was there before the impact fees were in," she added.

Committee member Ron McKelvy said impact fees make a

tremendous amount of sense.

"Especially since they will help alleviate the tax burden on people that already live here," he said. "It will also allow us to maintain the quality of life."

McKelvy said he thinks that the fees for residential development are very reasonable.

He added that he wished the county could collect the fees to assist with education.

State Rep. Tom Dickson (R-Cohutta), who attended the meeting, serves on the legislative committee now reviewing impact fee legislation.

"Various entities have said these are things we would like to see changed or adjusted," he said. "Some of the common wisdom is that if educational impact fees are going to be added to the list that potentially there is one or more of the seven (items that can be funded with the fees) that will need to come off. The committee has not gotten to that level of discussion."

The addition of educational funding from impact fees will require a constitutional amendment, he said.

"The main thing about this report is that we study it so we know what we are doing," said Catoosa County Chairman Bill Clark.

Ross said the next step is formulating the ordinance.

Ross will review the methodology report for commissioners Sept. 6 at 8 a.m. in the Courthouse conference room.

The Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing relating to the capital improvements element of the impact fee study Sept. 20 at the Courthouse. Commissioners scheduled hearings for October 18 and December 6 on the impact fee ordinance and could implement an impact fee ordinance as early as December 6.

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