



Ordinance altered: Amendment reduces fees for homes smaller than 1,200 square feet

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ROGERS — When the City Council granted approval to development impact fees for water and sewer hookups, they did so on the condition that the ordinance would be altered to protect low-income homebuyers from being shut out of the American dream by excess cost.

The Water Utilities Commission drafted an amendment that would lower fees for homes built in the city's affordable-housing zone. On Tuesday, aldermen will decide if this waiver sufficiently addresses their previous concerns.

Alderman Jim Clark, a member of the Public Works Committee, said the plan would make room for tightly budgeted families while also providing needed resources for the continued infrastructure needs of the city.

"It satisfies me," he said.

The ordinance's amendment reduces the fees for homes smaller than 1,200 square feet in the affordable-housing zone, which was created to allow for the building of smaller structures on smaller lots, increasing density and lowering the overall cost. The lowered fees will be \$350 for water service and \$1,100 for sewer service. Previously, these fees would have cost double that rate, at a combined cost of \$2,900 for homes with an average-size, five-eighths-inch line.

The commission had also considered waiving the fees altogether or granting waivers based on a home's permit value rather than its zoning.

Representatives from the Northwest Arkansas Homebuilders Association had argued against the fees at public hearings, saying the additional costs were cutting low-income homebuyers out of the equation because builders were forced to pass the cost on to the buyers.

At the hearings, local builder Bill Burckart, who has several affordable-housing projects in Bentonville and Rogers, said the fees would be acceptable if they were assessed using a method that was more sensitive to a home's actual impact on the overall infrastructure.

Commissioner Don Kendall said the revision addresses all concerns while still making continued growth-related projects possible for the utility. The fee break was necessary to

get the ordinance approved, and he considered the ordinance crucial to future growth in the city, he said.

“ I didn't really have a hard time making a decision on the issue because of the fact that it's pretty obvious that infrastructure is a critical issue in northwest Arkansas and in Rogers, and you have to find a way to fund it, ” he said. “ There were no other viable options provided by anybody. ”

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