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Impact fees '...all about equity'

Madison City Council taking steps to institute fee program for developers and builders

BY [COLIN SMITH](#)

The Madison City Council convened in a regular meeting Monday and conducted city business amidst tornado warning sirens, power outages and the constant report of thunder. Between interruptions, the council heard a presentation by Bill Ross of Bill Ross, Ross, & Associates concerning the City of Madison's plan to develop an impact fee system.

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Impact fees are contributions imposed by communities on developers or builders to pay for capital improvements within the community which are necessary to service or accommodate the new development. The fees would ensure that the existing tax base in Madison does not bear the burden of funding infrastructure for new growth. Revenue generated from those fees covers infrastructure that will be in use for at least 10 years, such as sewer and water lines, fire protection, parks and playgrounds.

According to Mayor Tom DuPree, the genesis of the plan stemmed from the expenses accrued through the construction of the several million dollar wastewater treatment plant, which was designed to create capacity for new growth and developments.

"It's all about equity," said DuPree. "It's not fair that someone who has lived here for 40 years should bear the cost of a new developer moving to the area."

The council is looking for a way to shift a greater share of the cost burden for this new water capacity to new development. The city can collect money from new growth through utility connection fees and adjust user fees over time, according to Ross.

"It's not going to be an immediate benefit, but there will be a benefit," Ross said.

Now in its beginning stages, the plan will allow city officials to decide what role impact fees will have in future expansion.

"It is very much up to you up until the very end of this process whether or not you want to go with impact fees or not. What we're doing through this process is setting the groundwork for meeting the requirements of the state so that you could adopt impact fees," said Ross.

With the current schedule, the final meeting to decide whether or not to adopt the fees would not happen until some time in January. An important factor that will determine how that schedule will proceed hinges on the timeliness of the city's transportation study, which is still in development. Ideally, the transportation study needs to be completed by late August in order to proceed along the current timeline.

"In late August we will have the final draft of the transportation plan. September 1 is the drop-dead deadline," said city planner Joanna Hayes.

The process begins with an assessment that gives consultants and planners the data needed to move forward. The assessment has revealed that to maintain current level

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of service into the future for Madison residents, the city may need to consider purchasing two more heavy vehicles for fire protection, increased fire station capacity, another 1,000 square feet of facility space for police and 14 more acres of parkland.

As of now, the assessment stage has been completed and Bill Ross, Ross, & Associates will now begin constructing a methodology report, which will determine how much of those future expenses can be passed on to incoming developers and builders.Â Georgia state law mandates that a city can charge no more than the fair share to new development as it comes into the city, requiring a close look at what the cityâ€™s current level of service is in various categories such as fire protection and park facilities. With this knowledge, planners can determine what they need to be in the future in view of economic growth.

The mayor stated that part of this effort involves trying to understand how the pursuit of green space would fit into the park concept. Â

â€œI think there is going to be an interest here for an increased level of service for parks and green space,â€ said DuPree.

Another plank in the plan includes the development of an advisory committee to assist the city in determining what fees should be levied on new developers. The committee is a volunteer committee comprised of 5 to ten members, 50 percent of which much be actively involved in development. Â

All interested parties must complete an application for public service obtained from City Hall by July 20, 2007.Â For questions, contact JoAnna Hayes at City Hall at (706)342-1251 x 226 or via email at JHayes@madisonga.com.

In other city business, the council granted a conditional use request for Jaswant Singh to open a restaurant on West Washington Street. The restaurant, which will have to-go and dine-in seating, will provide all-American fried fare for individuals who donâ€™t wish to travel all the way into downtown Madison. The request was granted on the condition that city officials and the applicants pursue measures to ensure that traffic does not become a hazard to pedestrians in the area. Measures include shared parking, speed limit reduction, and signage to decrease the probability of an accident or fatality.Â

The new restaurant may be sign of renewed economic life in that section of town.

â€œThe planning commission specifically spoke in favor of the project becauseâ€they wanted to see these dark spaces come to life,â€ saidÂ Hayes in her presentation to the city council.

The council also approved a request by Joe Smith on behalf of Steve Huggins for a variance for the cityâ€™s side setback requirement for a home at 485 Old Post Road. The variance was required for a renovation that expands the first floor of the Joshua Hill house roughly 25 percent of the current first floor, which encroaches into that setback.Â Joe Smith, the architect, stated that the renovation is compliant with Historical Preservation Committeeâ€™s rule of thumb.

â€œItâ€™s obvious that our zoning came way after this home was built in 1842.Â Neither the integrity of this historic home is going to be put in jeopardy by granting of this variance nor are our ordinances going to be put in jeopardy at allâ€I think weâ€™d be making an egregious mistake if we did not grant this variance,â€ said Michael Naples.

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