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The Jones County News / STPNS

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Impact fees: assessment report given to board

By *Debbie Lurie-Smith*
for *The Jones County News*

GRAY, Georgia (STPNS) -- Jones County commissioners were updated on the progress of the [study](#) of impact fees at a workshop, which preceded their meeting last week.

Bill Ross of Ross and Associates gave board members a copy of the Impact Fee Assessment Report completed by his firm July 10 and told the commissioners that the earliest they could adopt impact fees is January. Ross emphasized that going through the steps to study impact fees does not mean the county will adopt the fees.

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Ross said the county will hold four public hearings, two for capital improvement elements and two for the ordinance the county would adopt to implement the fees.

The Impact Fee Assessment Report discusses the seven public facility categories that could be included in Jones County's impact fee program and recommended inclusion of six of the seven.

The report recommends [moving](#) forward with an impact fee study that includes library, emergency [management](#), the Sheriff's office, parks and water and sewer.

The report states that under state law, the county can collect money as a one-time fee from new development based on the development's proportionate share of the cost to provide the services it generates.

Impact fees are authorized in Georgia under Code Section 37-71 of the Georgia Development Impact Fee [Act](#), and compliance is administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

According to the report, the provisions of DIFA are extensive in order to assure that new development pays no more than its fair share of the costs and that impact fees are not used for growth and not to solve existing service deficiencies.

Impact fees may be used for system improvements, such as improvements to public facilities designed to provide service to the community at large, but not project improvements, which are designed for a particular development project.

Impact fees may also be used for capital improvements that would have a useful life for at least 10 years; for example, land, buildings, and fire trucks.

Ross said determination of level of service is a key component of the impact fee calculation and is the foundation of determining future demand.

"If we adopt the level of service we have today, impact fees can be used to pay for services to new growth," he explained. Ross added that state law allows for exemptions for affordable housing and economic development, but he said the county will not get to the discussion of exemptions until November.

Ross said the next step is selecting an advisory committee and a kickoff public hearing.

"The hearing has to be advertised for two weeks, and it's a great time to officially appoint the advisory committee," he said.

Commissioner David Gault questioned the fact that the county's golf course was not listed on the study, and Ross told him that impact fees could not be directly used for a golf course.

Commissioner Bert Liston asked if the money could be used for more than one project at once.

"As much as you have money for," Ross replied.

Ross said [transportation](#) projects differ from other public facilities and the means to calculate those impact fees is expensive. It calls for a transportation model to determine future needs of a road [network](#) and a transportation plan. The plan would identify specific road improvement projects that would be necessary to reach or maintain the desired level of service.

"If you are interested in a countywide transportation study, it would give you the best data for future roads. It is very expensive computer model or you can have a traffic analysis," Ross said.

Mike Underwood asked if the accepted average of 10 trips a day for the residents in the county could be used.

Ross said yes, but the formula is more involved because of trying to estimate future growth, and it is not easily proved. He suggested the transportation study be held for a later date.

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