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Infill pushed as impact fee hike advances

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\$11,000 likely for new home

No one from the public spoke at a hearing Monday night on Casa Grande's proposal to increase development impact fees on residences and business and commercial properties.

Two councilmen, though, called for special efforts for infill projects and for redevelopment work, while Mayor Chuck Walton heavily criticized Bob Jackson, the top vote-getter in March's mayoral primary in which Walton placed third, as a person who talks much about redevelopment of the downtown but does nothing.

The hearing at the end of the regular City Council meeting was part of the formal steps the city must go through before introducing ordinances to increase the fees, yet to be fully discussed by the council.

The proposed increases would set the fee at \$11,090 for a new single-family home. The present fee is \$7,905.

There are separate fee schedules for the categories of commercial, office, business park, light industrial, warehousing, manufacturing and hotels and motels.

Impact fees are charged in an effort to make new growth pay its way, covering some of the cost of additional facilities and equipment rather than throwing it onto the backs of city taxpayers as a whole.

At the start of the hearing, Councilman Karl Peterson, recounting that the council had been studying the possibility of some sort of assistance or mitigation fund to offset impact fees paid by small businesses or nonprofit groups, asked that the possibility of such lowered rates for infill projects be studied. Councilman Steve Miller asked for study of ways to ease the fee impact on redevelopment projects.

City Manager Jim Thompson said both requests would be studied as part of the overall work on the fees.

Mayor Walton said it was his understanding that "if we have an old, dilapidated 5,000-square-foot commercial building and you tear it down and put a brand new one up, the only development fee would be the difference in the application."

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Administrative Services Director Scott Barber said the assessment would be made on the difference in square footage. "That would be evaluated and the fee would be based on the incremental increase in size. The change in use would also be considered. It's fairly fact-specific in terms of redevelopment projects.

"If you were tearing down a 5,000-foot store and putting up a 5,000-square-foot store, there would be no charge."

With replacement of a residence, Barber said, there would be no fee imposed, both because it is a replacement and because residences are assessed as a unit, not by square feet.

At the end of the council meeting during the time set aside for reports or comments from councilmen, Miller asked that city staff try to find ways to encourage people to invest in downtown redevelopment.

A volunteer committee is studying the downtown problems, but Miller said he believes that to the group, "we're looking like we're not stepping up to the plate as a council. We need a little help there, staff."

Thompson said updates would be prepared, noting that a study of downtown redevelopment has gone out to bid and that the first phase of the downtown streets project is under way.

Walton told the council, "I get a little frustrated when these arrows are shot at staff, and there's been arrows shot at council because we're ignoring our redevelopment of downtown.

"I think the public needs to know that there has been a committee established. The public needs to know that there's been several occasions that the committee didn't even have enough to have a quorum. They don't come to the meetings, they gather as individuals, they come around and take shots at council and staff, and I don't appreciate it.

"And as long as we're talking about neglect of redevelopment of downtown, I'll bring you one other public notice," Walton continued.

He said that several years ago at a cost of about \$120,000 the city purchased a block of property on East Second Street north of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic School to be used for redevelopment.

"Candidate for mayor Bob Jackson and his sister responded with what we thought was a favorable project," Walton, who received 488 votes to Jackson's 1,015, said. "They were going to build 20 houses on that block of ground.

"I reviewed that document and they've got to have that 20th house finished, according to the agreement they signed, by this coming July. I don't think that physically can happen.

"But there's a person or a group of people here that sit on these committees and take these shots and say that council and staff doesn't do enough for downtown, and we've got a person there that has got a discounted piece of ground and in his platform for mayor said that he's going to straighten that mess out and put a fire under everybody on the development, and he, himself, is the main culprit for why it has come to a screeching halt.

"So before we start shooting arrows at each other, don't throw stones if you live in a glass house."

The redevelopment committee to which Walton referred was appointed by the



City Council. Walton did not say why he and the council have not acted to replace members if they are not attending meetings.

Jackson, who is in a runoff for mayor with Jerry Odom, who placed second with 612 votes, was recently asked by the Casa Grande Dispatch about the status of his proposal for the redevelopment property.

His answer, in brief, was that it was on hold until the city decides what will be done with Second Street.

The Second Street proposal, along with the rest of the downtown project, has dragged on for years. Even with the start of the first phase of the downtown streets and flood control project, there is nothing specific about Second Street work, including when it might start and whether there will actually be enough money to complete any work.

Jackson told the newspaper that the uncertainty about Second Street, which would border part of his project, was a problem, both because no one knew what might be done and because if work began, it would disrupt residents of the project because of constant noise and other problems.

In other action Monday night, the council:

-- Approved a \$74,975 contract for construction surveying for the first phase of the downtown streets project.

-- Delayed consideration of a \$689,100 contract for a design and alignment study for the Santa Cruz Wash sewer project and delayed consideration of a resolution approving the sewage treatment feasibility study summary report.

-- Held a public hearing on annexing 1,944 acres at the northeast corner of Anderson and Clayton roads. No one from the public spoke.

-- Approved applying for a \$24,000 state grant to start a Spanish-language kiosk program, a \$21,360 state grant for a media literacy/Americans with Disabilities Act assistance program, a \$16,600 state grant for establishing a books by mail program at the city library and a \$28,000 state grant for a teen school information center at the library.

-- Awarded a \$15,000 contract for design and construction of art for the Pinal Avenue Plaza.

-- Accepted a bid from Gallo Construction of \$61,400 for a 34-foot by 42-foot ramada at North Mountain Park and a 16-foot by 16-foot ramada for the new dog park at Ed Hooper Rodeo Park/Paul Mason Sportsplex.

-- Approved purchase of a front-loader garbage truck at a cost of \$195,058.

-- Proclaimed May as Motorcycle Safety and Awareness Month.

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