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Developer impact fee to be discussed

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FORT WORTH -- Anticipating a major new ordinance that could help ease traffic congestion in the city, a far north Fort Worth neighborhood group has scheduled an informational meeting Aug. 23 open to all city residents.

The North Fort Worth Alliance wants to ensure that residents fully understand a proposed city ordinance that would force developers to pay impact fees to help cover road construction and improvements.

"This is just a huge piece of local city legislation, it's the most important thing in the last 10 years at least," said Colleen Demel, the alliance's executive director. "It is very important that we let our city leaders know that we support it and need it."

Developers now pay for streets in front of new homes and buildings through case-by-case agreements with the city. Under a proposed ordinance, which is likely to come before the City Council early next year, developers would continue to pay a fee to cover those costs and the traffic load their projects would add to nearby streets.

District 2 Councilman Sal Espino said he favors the impact fees. No other funding source can provide the money necessary to pay for streets needed in rapidly growing far north Fort Worth, he said.

Area residents have long complained that new neighborhoods have been built without consideration of their effect on the streets. The result has been severe traffic congestion, they said.

The Keller school district has been struggling for years to find safe ways to get students to Trinity Springs Middle School and Trinity Meadows Intermediate School on Keller-Hicks Road. District officials say the busy street is too dangerous for students to cross. The city has promised to widen Keller-Hicks to five lanes from two lanes in the area and has installed a sidewalk and a traffic light to ease safety concerns.

Students had to be bused from nearby neighborhoods last school year and may again this school year. More safety concerns are arising as Eagle Ridge Elementary School prepares to open by Golden Triangle Boulevard, another busy street.

Demel said the impact-fee ordinance makes sense and will prompt developers to widen roads and make other upgrades to help improve access to their projects.

The ordinance being drafted by the city staff could be reviewed by the council by early 2008, Fort Worth Planning Director Fernando Costa said. The fee structure would be similar to those used in other cities, he said, but the exact fees and a revenue estimate were not available.

The city would set up service areas throughout Fort Worth. Revenue would be used in the areas where it is collected, city Transportation Manager Mark Rauscher said.

Impact fees meeting

City officials will be available to talk to the public about roadway impact fees.

Where: Heritage Church of Christ, 4201 Heritage Trace Parkway

When: 7 p.m. Aug. 23

Information: Go to www.fortworthgov.org, click on the department list, then transportation and public works. To contact the North Fort Worth Alliance, go to www.northfortworthalliance.org.