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Monday was the first day the city-parish began collecting a new impact fee on new building permits to help offset traffic from new growth on East Baton Rouge roads.

The new impact fees were slated to go before the Metro Council on Wednesday, but Mayor-President Kip Holden's administration elected to impose them administratively when local Realtors and builders threatened to lobby against them.

The Greater Baton Rouge Association of Realtors and the Capital Region Builders Association were both concerned the new impact fees might drive development to neighboring parishes because they will increase the cost of an average new home in East Baton Rouge by \$532.

But city-parish Public Works Director Pete Newkirk said developers of large subdivisions may find they will pay less under the new system since they won't be required to negotiate turn lanes and other road improvements at the entrances of their developments in addition to the previous \$200 per home traffic impact fee.

"A turn lane costs about \$150,000, so that equals a lot of impact fees," Newkirk said Monday.

The new traffic-impact fees vary according to square footage, but have been raised for an average home to \$732. Developers, however, won't have to make any additional donations, he said.

Among those pushing the higher traffic-impact fees was the Baton Rouge Growth Coalition, which claimed the old system was unfair because it targeted large commercial developments, but not small ones.

Under the old system, commercial developments that included at least 30,000 square feet were required to negotiate a contribution to the city-parish.

Previously, commercial projects less than 30,000 square feet paid no traffic-impact fees, even though some of them — like convenience stores and fast-food restaurants — are major generators of traffic.

The new system will force all commercial developments to pay a traffic-impact fee.

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