



No May ballot spot for traffic impact fees

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Washington County Commissioners Tuesday voted to delay any more hearings on proposed traffic impact fee increases until April 22, making it impossible to put the issue to voters by May.

Additionally, the council asked that the Washington County Coordinating Committee provide some direction prior to the next public hearing, though commissioners will continue to receive testimony from industry and member cities.

Every person who testified at Tuesday's public hearing was respectful of the difficult situation the commissioners are in, with about \$3 billion in shortfalls forecast for new roads and road maintenance over the next 30 years.

But most thought proposed ordinance 691 was too tough on business.

Gary Johnson, of the International Council of Shopping Centers, said under the new proposal a 50,000 square-foot shopping center would go from paying about \$380,000 in TIF to about \$1.5 million. Increases of that size should be phased in over time to avoid market disruption, Johnson said.

Chris Girard, Chairman of the Oregon Neighborhood Store Association, said in a letter that the proposed increase could cripple development of small businesses like convenience stores. Eventually, development fees begin to hurt the economy, he said.

"Businesses with average annual pre-tax profits of only \$33,360 simply can not afford a new \$26,902 tax," Girard said.

Hillsboro contractor Gene Zurbrugg summed it up in a few words: "Businesses like Jack-in-the-Box just won't come in any more," he said.

A recent poll showing overwhelming voter support for increasing fees on developers may have been affected by the form of the questions asked, said Commissioner Andy Duyck.

When people think about developers paying more, they're thinking about housing, not business, Duyck said. It may be time for voters to think about it from the opposite viewpoint - that the money people make from business should be equitably shared for the common good.

"Business creates income - it creates wealth in a community," Duyck said. "If you continue to stress the goose, it stops laying the golden eggs."

Commissioner Dick Schouten said he was glad to see that people are getting involved, but added they need to remember this is a work in progress.

He reminded that by statute, traffic impact fees can only be used for transit and to build roads where necessary.

With gas prices on the rise and the specter of global warming looming, he said it is difficult to predict with any real accuracy how many vehicles will be on the road in the future.

Most of the business representatives seemed to think the commissioners would come up with a fair compromise.

"If we work together, I think we can come up with a good, equitable solution," North Plains Chamber of Commerce President Bob Horning said.

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