



Posted on Tue, Feb. 19, 2008

Council to discuss road, fee changes

New rules aim to assist builders

By Mike Cherney

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New subdivisions could have higher-quality green space and developers could pay for more road repairs if Horry County Council passes new guidelines at its meeting today.

The council will also discuss creating an impact fee - a fee charged to builders that would help pay for parks, roads and public safety vehicles.

The road and green space requirements will be added to county regulations that govern land development. A committee of developers, residents and county staff has been revising the 216-page regulations for the past year.

Previously, subdivisions that had four residential units per acre were required to have green space. Now green space will be required for subdivisions with two residential units per acre, according to the revised regulations.

The new regulations will also make it easier for builders who want to forego green space requirements in their development to pay a per-square-foot fee to the county, which would be used to purchase green space elsewhere.

Previously, a complicated formula was used to determine the fee. Now developers will be able to pay \$4 per square foot per single-family home.

Steven Annese, a landscape architect with The Earthworks Group, an engineering firm involved in the revisions, said the old formula made it too expensive for developers to pay the open-space fee.

No developer had ever used it, he said.

"If it was more financially viable, a lot more people would have jumped on it," he said.

Developers will also be required to improve the quality of green space. Previously, drainage ditches or strips of grass along roads counted as green space.

The new regulations will also require builders to pay for road repairs on any public roads built in new subdivisions for three years. Previously, developers were only responsible for road repairs for one year.

The county is required to take over the maintenance of new public roads as long as they are built according to county standards, said Steve Gosnell, the county's infrastructure director.

Councilman Carl Schwartzkopf said extending the warranty period will cut costs for taxpayers by making developers responsible for road repairs for a longer time period.

But Councilman Kevin Hardee said he was unsure whether he would support the proposal. He said he is considering asking the council to change the proposed warranty period to two years.

"The housing market and the development market is flat right now," Hardee said. "Adding fees on top of that at this particular time is not good."

Robert Castles Jr., the president of a Myrtle Beach engineering firm, told council members in a letter last week that he had some concerns about the financial impact on developers and consumers of the new guidelines.

But Castles' secretary said that all of his concerns had been resolved after a meeting with county officials last week. Castles could not be reached for comment Monday.

The council will also discuss creating an impact fee. State law requires the county to commission a study to determine exactly how much to charge for the fee.

The proposed impact fee would charge \$757 per home and \$724 per mobile home. But those numbers are based on a 2001 study by TischlerBise, a consulting firm, using data from the 2000 census.

At a council meeting earlier this month, the council passed the first of three readings for the impact fee.

But it also voted down spending \$101,000 to update the TischlerBise study.

County Council Chairwoman Liz Gilland, who voted for the impact fee but against getting an updated study, said she did not want to spend the money because the 2001 study, which cost about \$75,000, was wasted when no impact fee was passed.

But if the council passes the proposed impact fee ordinance a second time, Gilland said she would support updating the TischlerBise study.

If you go

What | Horry County Council meeting

When | 6 p.m. today

Where | Horry County Government & Justice Center, 1301 Second Ave., Conway 915-5000

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