



Tuesday, Feb 5, 2008

Posted on Tue, Feb. 05, 2008

Fort Worth officials look at impact fee for roads

By MIKE LEE

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

There are 1,600 new houses in the Sendera Ranch subdivision, but only one major road connecting it to the rest of the community. Avondale-Haslet Road still looks like it did when the surrounding land was dotted with cattle, because the city doesn't have the money to improve it.

Traffic is already bad, and it's likely to get worse if the building boom in far north Fort Worth continues. Eventually, 8,000 homes could be built in Sendera, along with a school and fire station.

One solution to the problem would be to have developers pay a fee to offset the burden that new subdivisions put on surrounding roads. Fort Worth's proposed fee is in the planning stages, but it's already sparking debate.

The impact fee would be charged for each new house or commercial building, based on the amount of traffic it is projected to produce. Impact fees are common in other North Texas cities, and Fort Worth has a similar fee to pay for expanding the sewer system.

The amount of the fee hasn't been determined, said Jim Walker, a deputy transportation director. But plans call for a range of fees -- lower in inner-city neighborhoods that have sufficient roads and higher in far-flung areas that would require new streets.

"We think in the long run there needs to be an incentive to encourage development according to some sort of managed growth plan," he said.

Under state law, the city must calculate the amount of new road construction required to serve each new home or business, and then it can charge a percentage of that amount. Walker said the City Council is scheduled this month to approve some of the land-use assumptions needed to calculate the fee.

Proponents, including the North Fort Worth Alliance, see the fee as a way for developers to pay for the strain that new subdivisions put on the road system. They've been petitioning the city for years to build more roads faster.

The Greater Fort Worth Builders Association commissioned a study that shows that the impact fee would be unfair. The study found that homes in new subdivisions already pay more in taxes than they require in services, which has allowed the city to plow its new revenue into older neighborhoods.