

Ascension president plans to offer impact fee proposal

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GONZALES — Ascension Parish President Ronnie Hughes still intends to introduce transportation impact fees to the Parish Council tonight.

Impact fees are one-time charges put on new developments based on the premise that the development should pay for the increased burden on the parish's infrastructure.

As proposed, the fees would primarily fund right-of-way acquisition for adding a lane or shoulders, while some funds could pay for future consultants' fees to update the impact fee structure and to cover administrative costs.

"We are approaching a point where we are paying more for land than the widening," Hughes said Tuesday night during a special parish Transportation Committee meeting to consider a master transportation list.

"I wish we had a solution other than using local dollars. We don't have a lot of choices."

Council members will decide whether to implement impact fees, but a supermajority of the council — eight of 11 — is needed to pass the measure.

The fee amount varies based on a schedule that categorizes residential, retail, institutional and industrial structures depending on the anticipated extra demand put on the roads.

The use of impact fees plays a major role in the draft version of a master transportation plan that consultants URS Corp. presented to the transportation committee.

It was one of three sources of funding for the master plan, along with a bond issue backed by a sales tax and state/federal dollars as the two additional sources.

Without the impact fee, the number of capacity improvement projects would be limited and hinder future efforts because of the escalating costs of land, URS representative Tom Hunter said. As an example, he referred to the U.S. 190 project in St. Tammany Parish where right-of-way cost was higher than the actual construction.

A separate consultant is working with the parish to develop the impact fee ordinance. The ordinance expected to be introduced tonight is the 12th version.

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