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## Auditor faults Olympia's use of impact fees

### Report criticizes city's collection and spending methods

By Matt Batchelder | The Olympian • Published October 15, 2008

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OLYMPIA - State Auditor Brian Sonntag released an audit Tuesday that criticizes the city of Olympia for the way it has collected and spent the impact fees charged to developers.

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State law allows a city to charge a developer impact fees according to the size and scope of a project. The theory is that population growth also pays for the greater demand for government services it causes - for education, fire protection, parks and transportation.

### City Council action

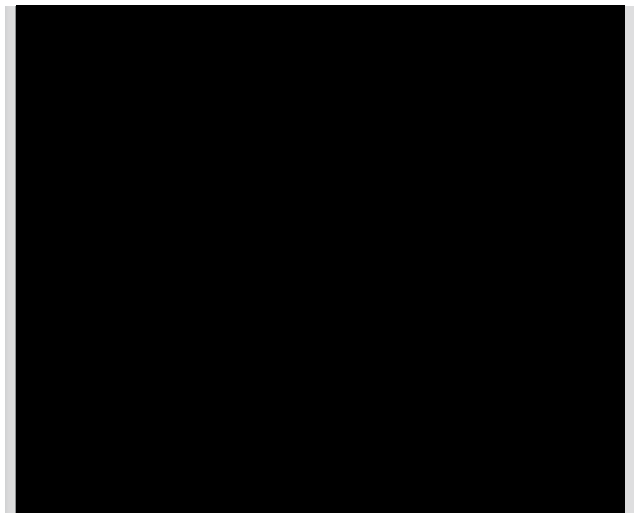
On Tuesday, the Olympia City Council voted to:

**Approve a contract** to pay \$1.37 million for design on a new fire station and training center to Rice Fergus Miller, a Bremerton architectural firm.

**Approve on first reading** an ordinance to conduct a feasibility study on turning the strip of land between Capitol Lake and Budd Inlet into a park. The council previously stated its intent to do so; the ordinance formalizes the request from a citizens' group to pass the ordinance.

Among the findings in the auditor's report:

**Olympia does not send** interest it receives on school impact fees to the school district along with fees. "Therefore, the interest earned while the impact fees were invested does not appear to be expended for the purpose for which the impact fee was imposed," the report



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says. It recommends the city send past and future interest earnings to the district.

**Olympia's fire impact fee** rates and calculation do "not appear to effectively demonstrate the fee's connection to system improvements related to growth, the cost of public facilities necessitated by new development or the availability of other financing." The report finds that the city possibly overcharged between \$185,565 and \$345,313 in impact fees. But it also finds the city could have undercharged the fire impact fee, because the calculation for the fee isn't tied to the city's capital facilities plan.

The report recommends the city re-evaluate the fee and whether it's necessary.

**Olympia spends park impact** fees on parks citywide, not in the areas where the fees are generated. Therefore, residents' wishes may not be satisfied. The report found \$36,974 in neighborhood park impact fees "potentially spent greater than three miles" from where the fees were generated.

The report suggests the city break park spending into two zones "to demonstrate a clear relationship between where impact fees are collected and spent."

**State law on impact** fees is vague, "particularly regarding the items cities may purchase with impact fee money," and should be clarified to assist cities. For example, Olympia spent road impact fees on bike trails because it interpreted the law to allow it.

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