

## **Bonita Springs council waives additional impact fees for couple who already paid**

By TARA E. McLAUGHLIN

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A Bonita Springs couple will not have to pay impact fees to open a retail shop in an empty bank building they own.

Abe and Danka Asli faced tens of thousands of dollars in impact fees because one interpretation of an ordinance would have required additional fees for changing use categories from bank to retail.

Lee County and Bonita share the same language and Lee County interprets the ordinance to mean the fees are required, but Bonita has only begun to face such requests.

City Council on Wednesday unanimously agreed that the ordinance could also allow the fee waiver as long as the use was no more intense than the previous use allowed.

"If you have a bank, that's a pretty intense use, and you've already paid your impact fees and then you want to go with a less intense use ... you pay the fees again? To me that's not fair," Mayor Ben Nelson said.

The Aslis, whose building is the former location of World Savings Bank at 26851 U.S. 41, said these fees discourage local development.

"When this impact fee is not scaring people then investors get the courage to buy empty buildings," Abe Asli said. "This is good for (the) city. This is good for everybody."

Councilman John Spear cautioned that the ordinance also supported Lee County's conclusion and further clarification should be made.

"When we're talking numbers like this, (upwards of \$60,000) based on vague ambiguous language, ... I think we ought to direct staff to (clarify) in a sentence or two ... an amendment to the ordinance," Spear said.

Councilman Richard Ferreira also had concerns about the impact on the budget and whether waivers amounted to shifting the burden of a bad business decision onto taxpayers.

"I see a storm coming, and the storm is we could be setting a precedent," Ferreira said.

To which Nelson replied: "It's a precedent of fairness.

In other matters, the council supported Ferreira's efforts to establish a prescription drug collection and disposal program in cooperation with law enforcement officers. Ferreira said unused prescription drugs can easily make it into the hands of kids or be flushed down the toilet where water treatment facilities cannot remove the chemicals.

"It's becoming a real menace for young addiction," Ferreira said. "It's a menace for suicide. It's a menace for our water supply."

Councilman Bill Lonkart will be participating in a workshop Jan. 13 to discuss the possible paving of Smokey Drive and Cherry Street.

"You really need to take care of the older streets in some way to make the community more attractive and increase the retail value of the homes," he said.

The League of Women Voters will host a candidate debate at City Hall on Jan. 19 at 5:30 p.m.

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