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Boynton officials ready to charge builders more money to improve parks

By Erika Pesantes
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Boynton beach Commissioners are poised to give final approval Wednesday to an impact fee hike that will help fund new green spaces and spruce up parks throughout the city.

"We're really at a unique time in the city in terms of development and growth," said Wally Majors, director of parks and recreation.

With over 160 acres of land dedicated to parks in the city, officials hope to add another 40 acres and plan to develop 63 acres of existing park land, according to the recreation and parks strategic master plan commissioners approved in April. The plan calls for 3 acres of recreation space for every 1,000 residents.

Impact fees are new development charges that developers pay for needs created by growth. Commissioners made the proposal based on a study and review of current impact fees. The study suggested an increase of 50 percent for single-family homes, 36 percent for townhomes and 41 percent for condominiums and apartments. Changes to the fees were made because of increases in property values.

Developers will have to pay \$1,418 for each single-family home, \$1,045 per townhouse and \$924 per apartment or condominium.

Money from these impact fees is set aside in a parks and recreation trust fund. As of September 2005, there was \$2.2 million in the fund, said City Manager Kurt Bressner.

For 2006-2007, the parks and recreation portion of the proposed capital improvement program is \$14.5 million, nearly half the cost of all capital improvement projects in the budget.

"People always like to have additional parks and neighborhood parks," said Mayor Jerry Taylor. "There's a constant upkeep -- maintenance, replacing equipment in parks. It's an ongoing cost."

Although there is no estimate on how much revenue the city will raise from the fees, plans are in place to improve several parks, some of which were damaged by Hurricane Wilma.

Among the projects is a nearly \$8 million renovation to the Wilson Center that includes replacing the center's pool built in 1958. When the city finalizes its building permit, it will ask for bids on that project, Majors said.

The city also plans to create a new 2.5-acre park at a former mango farm in the southeastern part of the city, which will have basketball courts, an exercise trail, picnic tables and pavilions.

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