

Thursday, April 2, 2009

Brunswick revisits impact fees on new development

Brunswick Crossing still unlikely to be required to pay more fees

by Connor Adams Sheets | Staff Writer

Eleven months after voting to commission a study on impact fees on what new development costs the city, Brunswick officials are again looking at ways to ensure new residents pay their fair share for city services and capital projects.

The study, released March 23, was pursued as a means of determining what amount, if any, the city should levy in "impact fees," or charges a municipality can require developers to pay for improvements, such as new park space or police and fire department capabilities.

An initial study was released in November 2007, but the Brunswick Council voted in April 2008 to commission a second study that did not include Brunswick Crossing, a 1,500-home development that broke ground northwest of the city last year, in the calculations.

The amount of money consultant TischlerBise estimates the city will have to collect to keep up with expanding service and facility needs has increased significantly since the first study.

For instance, the estimate identified in the 2007 study said additional demand for police service would cost \$100 to \$150 per new housing unit. But in the new study, which was more comprehensive and included some costs not considered in the initial one, the estimated impact fee for police service is \$306 per single family home, and \$210 per any other housing unit. The amount suggested to help pay for parks and municipal services also increased, as a result of the inclusion of costs associated with the city's pool and skate park.

Against the urgings of Councilman Jeremy Biser, the city ruled in April 2007 that the new study should not include Brunswick Crossing for impact fee consideration. But the council discussed the issue again at the city's March 24 meeting. Councilmen Karin Tome and Jeremy Biser sought to revisit the issue; Tome was not on the council when the April 2007 ruling was made, and she questioned why Brunswick Crossing should be exempt from the fees.

Ultimately, however, she said she would wait to discuss the issue further until an April 14 scheduled hearing. The board plans to vote on an impact fee ordinance at that meeting. Biser ceded that, since the political will seems to be lacking to include Brunswick Crossing in the fees, it may be more useful to simply look at the ordinance as it stands.

"I think we should stay focused on whether or not we should legislate impact fees," Biser said.

Impact fees were not included in the 2002 Brunswick Crossing annexation that the city's residents voted to approve and, as such, Mayor Carroll Jones and the majority of the council has said all along that it would be excessive to ask for more fees, which would be ultimately passed on to Brunswick Crossing homebuyers.

"I think they're doing their fair share," former Councilman Ron Bruchey, who was still on the board at the time, said in April 2007. "And I think a handshake is an agreement."

Jones and most of the council's members have said that Pleasants Development, who is building Brunswick Crossing, is already paying its fair share through a special tax district and improvements including multimillion-dollar contributions to the city's wastewater treatment plant.

"They have provided well or beyond what is required for the development, and that will be paid by them through the special tax district," Town Administrator David Dunn said at the March 24 meeting.

Additionally, Jerry Connelly, senior vice president of Pleasants, pointed out that Brunswick Crossing will bring in about \$2.6 million per year in property tax revenue for the city. Currently, the 2,200 homes in the city bring in \$1.8 million per year in property taxes, meaning the new residents would already be contributing considerably more to the city's bottom line per household than current residents.

"The question is, how much do you put on a particular group of people just because they're not here yet to defend themselves? They will be," Connelly said. "... At some point, it's just like your own mortgage on your own house. It's not endless how much you can keep shelling out."

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-Brunswick City Hall, 1 W. Potomac St.

-7 p.m. April 14

-Arrive 15 minutes early to sign up to speak

-Call City Hall at 301-834-7500 for more information