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Local News

Builders say no to impact fee hikeBy **Diane Strand**

The MidWeek

Members of the DeKalb County Builders and Developers Association have told city staff they don't want to play impact fees. Out-of-step with neighboring communities, area builders have denounced the city's proposed fee, saying the formula

used to develop it is flawed.

City staff proposed a more than \$16,000 single impact fee per dwelling, with all costs melded into one, rather than separate fees for schools, parks, roads and other city services. The services are provided for a new development and its residents. The new fee is three to four times the prior rate.

In a letter to the commission, the builders said, "The household population charts...are outdated and grossly overestimate the number of school-aged children in new construction." They also said the U.S. Census Bureau data "shows gross overestimating" and added that DeKalb's method doesn't allow for students who will attend parochial schools or will be home-schooled." They also said DeKalb staff plan to use impact fees for items that are not allowable.

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The formula was developed by researcher NIU Roger Dahlstrom, who also was planner for the City of Elgin for many years. The formula has been adopted by 20-25 communities across the state, Dahlstrom said. .

Responding to the criticisms were Andy Small and Tom Teresinski, current and former presidents of the DeKalb School Board.

Teresinski said, "This has been done in 20 school districts, each different community. We want adoption across all three communities (DeKalb, Malta and Cortland)." He

said the work was done by NIU's Center for Governmental Studies, "indicating a very solid foundation for that methodology. It has never been challenged in court.

Sycamore just changed its impact fee for the third time in 18 months and is going for transition fees as well," Teresinski said.

Small pointed out the school district first must provide for hundreds of students from developments already in the pipeline; they have been approved but are yet unbuilt. They won't be subject to the new impact fee plan.

Pat Bragg, a school board member many years ago, warned that the district once overestimated its expected student population and had to sell Roberts School, which now houses NIU's School of Nursing. "Don't overbuild," said Bragg. She also said she was married to an NIU faculty member and added, "I'm suspicious of university research;" the comment prompted laughter from the large audience.

Brian Grainger, current president of the DCBDA, said, "I have been building for 10 years and see a lot of changes. At some point, we need to step back and see what the big picture is. I have a lot of concern about the way we're going. Our average sale price (for a single-family residence) is \$174. After this (the proposed impact fee), DeKalb (housing) will be for

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outsiders who can afford (for example, homes priced at \$230,000). People near retirement age are leaving the area because their property taxes are going up a lot. Where will we be down the road and who's going to live here?"

Former Plan Commission member Herb Rubin said he was "puzzled by the letter from the developers." He said the alternative to an agreement on impact fees is a continued moratorium on annexation, because a Growth Summit agreement among service providers nixed any more annexation without adequate buildings for schools.

Builder Steve Irving, who earlier had suggested impact fees be even higher, argued, "The real impact on schools is the impact from the sale of existing homes."

He pointed out that many young families with a lot of children move into older homes because they cannot afford new construction. He favored transfer taxes for the schools to be paid when an existing home is purchased.

Plan commissioners John Guio and Michael Welch suggested they be given extra time to review the position paper from the builders' association. However, commission chairman Rich Fassig said, "It seems to me we had plenty of time."

There was a motion to table the issue until the commission's Oct. 26 meeting. The motion passed 3-1 with Fassig opposed.

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