

- News
- Metro
- North County
- Tijuana/Border
- California
- Nation
- Mexico
- World
- In Iraq
- War on Terror
- Business
- Education
- Features
- Health | Fitness
- Military
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Politics
- Science
- Technology
- Multimedia
- Forums
- Columnists
- Weblogs
- Special Reports
- Solutions
- Weather
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Building fees to buy millions in facilities

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Santee new-home buyers will bear the entire cost

By Michele Clock
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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SANTEE – Steep new development fees here could generate \$15 million for new ball fields, traffic signals, road improvements and other items over the next 10 years.

The catch?

In the end, new homeowners will foot the bill, city and building industry officials said.

On Wednesday night, the Santee City Council unanimously approved nearly \$7,000 in new development fees for each new home built in the city, as well as commercial and industrial

development fee increases of more than 40 percent. Building permit and other related costs will rise by 30 percent.

The fees will go into effect June 13 and will automatically adjust for inflation, officials said.

It will now cost \$16,274 in development impact fees to build a single-family home in Santee, up from \$9,497. This will make Santee the third most costly jurisdiction in the county in which to build a home, after Chula Vista (\$18,660) and Oceanside (\$16,829), said city officials, citing data from a 2004 fee survey by the Building Industry Association of San Diego County.

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The most dramatic single change: a newly created public facilities fee, which will call on developers to pay \$4,740 per single-family home and nearly \$4,274 per unit for multifamily dwellings. The city plans to set aside those funds to improve parks, building indoor and outdoor soccer fields and ballparks at the Town Center Community Park, for example.

Long-standing fees, such as drainage, traffic and traffic signal fees, had last been updated in 1991 and were outdated, said Douglas Willford, the city's deputy city manager and development services director. He said the new fee schedule took a year to pull together and that its timing had nothing to do with the recent defeat of Proposition X. The February measure would have forced projects such as as Fanita Ranch and Sky Ranch to downscale. It was soundly rejected in a special election.

With 3,000 new homes either under construction or in the development process in Santee, Willford said it was crucial to rethink these fees.

"If we were ever going to take another look at these fees, we had to do it now," he said.

While developers will pay the fees, the costs will be passed along to new-home buyers, said Jerry Livingston, staff counsel at the county's Building Industry Association, a trade association that represents builders, contractors and other related workers.

"It's the significant dilemma (surrounding) fees in a community," Livingston said. "They're strapped for financing local improvements and they pass them on to the individual home buyer, and, in cases like this, it's not like the home buyers are going to be the only ones using the new services. It does tend to benefit other people on the backs of new-home purchasers."

The Building Industry Association took no formal position for or against the fee increases.

But Mayor Randy Voepel said that it's only fair that new homeowners pay their fair share of new city infrastructure.

"They'll be the first ones to say, 'My little Johnny doesn't have a ball field to play on,' " he said. "They'll be the first to gripe."

■ Michele Clock: (619) 593-4964; michele.clock@uniontrib.com

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