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Cape denies impact fee hike

Park proposal sought increase of \$4,000

By Don Ruane

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A proposed \$4,000 increase in Cape Coral's park impact fee was too rich for the City Council's taste Monday.

"There ain't no way in the world I'm going to support a \$5,000 impact fee for parks and recreation," Councilman Tim Day said. "We're just pricing people out of here."

The city has to substitute meatloaf for the steak on the menu of park system improvements, Day said. The city may even have to eat peanut butter sandwiches for awhile, he added.

Impact fees are one-time charges on newly built homes and commercial structures. The fees are used to provide services required by growth, but by law they cannot be used to operate and maintain the services after they are provided.

The park proposal would raise the fee from \$1,115 to \$5,152. The latest increase occurred in 2003.

Council members asked the city staff to find some other options to pay for hundreds of millions of dollars of land and work needed to build the parks and athletic fields promised in the city's comprehensive plan.

IN OTHER BUSINESS

The Cape Coral City Council on Monday also:

- Learned that starting Monday, westbound traffic on Cape Coral Parkway won't be allowed to turn left onto Del Prado Boulevard during the morning rush hour to allow more time for traffic headed for the bridge to get through that intersection.
- Asked the National Association of Minority Contractors for more information about becoming a corporate sponsor, which costs \$10,000.
- Asked staff for information about deed restrictions that limit the use of 19 city properties to parking. Removing the restrictions would allow the city more flexibility in how it uses the properties.
- Approved a \$100,680 contract with Management Partners Inc. to do a thorough review of the city's permitting process
- Approved a \$38,310 contract with Hartman Associates for a study of the city's utility impact fees.

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Those changes could include amending the comprehensive plan to eliminate some projects, such as a \$12 million golf course, the city's second, and to devote a portion of property taxes to parks and recreation. Using property taxes would mean current residents will help pay for parks and recreation facilities required by growth.

Tax increases often follow impact fee increases to pay for the daily care and operation of the parks, said Patti Schnell, executive director of the Cape Coral Construction Industry Association. The council's comments were encouraging, she said.

Councilman Jim Jeffers said he was concerned that the proposed park impact fee increase, when combined with proposed fire, police and emergency medical service impact fees, would raise the total impact fee to about \$17,700.

On top of that, the city approved a contract Monday to conduct a study on updating the city's utility impact fees.

The park fee was recommended in a study done by Burton & Associates. It's based on the minimum state recommendations for parks, said Steve McDonald of Burton & Associates.

The study anticipates 89,930 new residents over the next five years. It will cost \$130.4 million to provide the land and facilities they'll require. Impact fees won't come in all at once, so with financing, the cost increases to an estimated \$245.8 million, McDonald said.

The study only shows what the plans will cost, McDonald said. The council can reduce the number and size of the proposed projects, which include 10 neighborhood parks.

Councilwoman Dolores Bertolini proposed dedicating a portion of property taxes to parks and suggested that the city require developers to donate land for parks as part of their projects.

Mayor Eric Feichthaler said the proposed increase was excessive and an impediment to people who move to the city. Something about half the size of the increase might be more appropriate, he said.

The city's park plans provide a basic park system, City Manager Terry Stewart said. Had a higher fee recommended in 2002 been passed, the city wouldn't need such a large increase now, he said.

The high price of land today contributes to the need, said Steve Pohlman, parks and recreation director.

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