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## City moves toward impact fees

### Laconia:

Years in the works, the city is inching closer toward implementing impact fees for new construction.

City Planner Shanna Saunders earlier this week updated the city council on some fine-tuning that she and the planning board had done on an impact fee proposal created for Laconia by consultant Bruce Mayberry. Later, she was directed to bring the matter back to the planning board.

The planning board will incorporate the "tweaks" into zoning-regulation language that will be the subject of a public hearing, possibly at the board's April 5 meeting. After considering the public comment from the hearing, the board will vote on whether to send the changes to the city council for what should be final acceptance.

If the fees are approved, Saunders has recommended that they should be enacted at 25 percent of the level suggested by Mayberry.

In May 2010, the city council held an almost two-hour public hearing on impact fees that featured testimony from supporters, opponents and observers. The comments led to the inclusion of a "safety valve" in the fee ordinance for housing built by non-profit organizations and a waiver of the "schools" portion of the impact fee on permanent housing for senior citizens.

The council has said it wants the fees to be charged against a developer at the time of subdivision approval to cover the impact on city schools, police, fire, roads, recreation, the library and the municipal water and sewer systems.

Russ Thibeault, a principal with Applied Economic Research who spoke at the time as a Laconia resident, said his company had done studies for both Nashua and the city of Franklin, Mass., each of which was the first, if not among the first, in their respective states to adopt impact fees.

He said impact fees are "rare" in the Lakes Region but were "extremely common and totally accepted Concord and south."

Thibeault said few communities with the fees in the state experienced any sort of negative result from them. The fee schedules should be updated regularly, said Thibeault, who noted that, had Laconia had impact fees in place in 2005, "you could have had a million dollars right now."

Impact fees could have been used to recoup some of the cost of the new Laconia Middle School and to buy equipment to fight to keep variable milfoil out of the city's water supply, the city council learned.

State law, Saunders has said, permits a municipality to recover the cost of a variety of capital improvements that have been deemed necessary to provide services to the residents of new residential and non-residential developments.

She said all impact fees would go into dedicated funds so that, for example, school fees could only be used for school projects. If unused within six years, the impact fees would be reimbursed to the person(s) who paid them.

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