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maintenance may suffer

City of Lakeland Not Likely To Raise Parks Impact Fees

Commissioners say in light of recession, an increase would send bad message.

*By [Kyle Kennedy](#)
THE LEDGER*

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LAKELAND | City officials in Lakeland are backing away from a proposed impact fee hike to pay for city parks, saying it would send the wrong message in a bad economy.

Commissioners were expected to hear the final reading of an ordinance Tuesday that would have raised the parks impact fees assessed on new housing. The measure would have raised fees from \$2,707 to \$2,885 on single-family homes, \$2,123 to \$2,242 for apartments and \$1,317 to \$1,391 for manufactured homes.

But during Friday's agenda review session, commissioners said they were concerned about public and business community reaction to any fee increase during a recession.

"I was concerned that if we raised them this year the private sector would see Lakeland taking a position that's another indicator of more taxes," Commissioner Don Selvage told The Ledger. "More of a perception than reality ... but I think perception is important because of the economy we're facing right now. People are leery of higher taxes and fees."

With the goal of having development pay for itself, impact fees are paid by the developers of new buildings, who in turn pass on the cost to the building owners. City officials had originally wanted to raise impact fees for police, fire and parks and recreation, but last month Community Development Director Jim Studiale said he and other officials would settle for just the parks impact fees being raised.

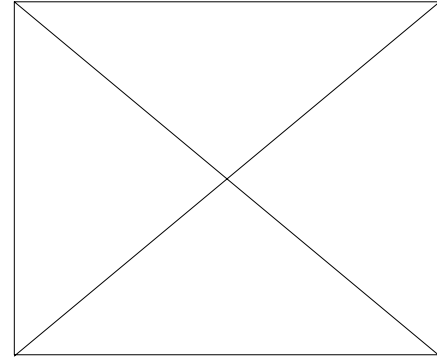
Studiale said the city was asking for only half the increase recommended by a mandated study.

Commissioner Glenn Higgins said Friday that feedback from residents and business officials has been overwhelmingly opposed to increases of any fees or taxes.

"The impact fees don't impact everybody," Higgins told The Ledger. "(But) the remainder of this year I can't support any kind of increase of fees and taxes. I've seen enough and heard enough to know it's not the time to do this."

The Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce voiced its opposition to an impact fee increase in a June 24 letter to city officials, saying fees should be kept at present levels.

It appears the City Commission will do just that. An ordinance to be presented at Tuesday's 9 a.m. commission meeting will maintain current impact fee amounts, if approved.



In discussing the new ordinance Friday, Mayor Gow Fields said the lack of additional parks funding could affect maintenance of recreational facilities and incite complaints from some residents. Fields said commissioners should not blame city parks staff if maintenance declines because of tight funding.

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Studiale said Friday that he knew the economy would play a factor in impact fee discussions.

"I brought the most modest (increase) recommendation I could because I'm aware of the times," he said.

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