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City to revisit talk on proposed impact fees

By Steve Ramirez / Sun-News reporter

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LAS CRUCES - Should additional impact fees for major road improvements, increased public safety and drainage be assessed citywide or should they only be charged in the growth areas of Las Cruces' east and west mesa.

There was no consensus Monday from city council as it discussed the options at a work session at City Hall. The council only agreed that it wants to talk about it some more, and Mayor Ken Miyagishima said he will call a special council work session at 1 p.m. Feb. 17. By then, Miyagishima and city administrators hope to have a better indication of how much those impact fees would be and how residents would be affected by the proposed addition of impact fees.

"Ultimately, it would come down to the residents paying for those in one way or another," said Petra Chavez, a retired accountant who has lived just to the north of the Mesquite Historic District for the past 30 years. "If it were to mean that my neighbors and I could be guaranteed better police and fire protection, then, sure, I'd be willing to pay my fair share."

"But growth always sparks the need for increased impact fees, and I can agree that the new homeowners, new businesses that come to the city should bear the brunt of those costs more so than those of us that have been living here a long time. I'd like to hear more about it; I'm glad that the council wants to take some time to examine this. But as fast as Las Cruces is growing, it looks like (the

addition of impact fees) has to happen." Miyagishima said proposed impact fees for major road improvements, public safety and storm drainage could be too much. An independent study conducted by Duncan Associates, of Austin, Texas, has estimated the combined impact fee for the three additional public services could cost an additional \$5,100. Those added costs would be charged primarily to home builders and developers, who would pass on those costs to customers who either bought houses or opened businesses.

"In all fairness, I need to know how it's going to be utilized before I can decide one way or another," Miyagishima said. "To me, based on what I've seen, that (approximate amount) seems too excessive."

But members of the city's Capital Investment Advisory Committee (CIAC), which includes representation from home builders and developers, have recommended that the council exempt the city's core area from the additional impact fees because much of the land in the city's core is already occupied and only in-fill development could occur.

"Incentives that would help out the downtown area by eliminating impact fees would be great," said Greg Smith, president of the Las Cruces Downtown Partnership, a nonprofit organization that is promoting the revitalization of downtown Las Cruces.

Judd Singer, CIAC chair, added, "Most development is occurring on the east side of town and little in the in-fill areas."

Isaac Chavez, representing the Las Cruces Board of Realtors, said current land use assumptions used by the city to determine impact fees need to be changed. He added that what has been proposed

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doesn't correspond to estimates used in the draft of the Vision 2040 Plan, which is supposed to help guide development in Doña Ana County through the year 2040.

"We can't talk out of both sides of our mouth," Chavez said. "There's a lot of unknowns that have to be answered before we charge a public safety fee."

And, those are the unknowns city officials want answers for before they'll commit to additional impact fees.

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Impact fees

Currently, the city of Las Cruces charges impact fees for parks, water and wastewater services.

Those one-time fees are assessed to home builders and developers, and are passed on to residents who buy houses or open businesses.

City officials are considering additional impact fees for major road improvements, public safety, and drainage.

If adopted, Las Cruces would charge the same impact fees as those being assessed in Rio Rancho, Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Any additional impact fees could take as long as three years to implement in Las Cruces.

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