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Coolidge News

City approves sewer impact fee agreement

By PRESTON McCONKIE, Staff Writer November 22, 2005

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A plan to allow housing developers to pre-pay sewer development impact fees in order to finance expansion of the city's wastewater treatment plant was delayed by haggling over scheduled fee increases, but the deadlock was broken when the City Council agreed to freeze fees at the current level of \$2,890.

In July, Public Works Director Don Peters told the council he needed their approval for a pre-payment agreement.

"I need four million dollars," Peters said. "The clock is ticking. I have developers who say they want to flush by this time next summer."

But when the new development fees went into effect in Nov. 2004, they were scheduled to increase after every batch of 500 housing permits was sold. For developers to front the cost of a \$4.5 million, 1 MGD sewer treatment plant expansion would require 1,557 permits at the initial \$2,890 level. With more than 600 permits sold and increases already due, developers dug in their heels.

The result was a four-month delay in expected payments from developers, and at last the office of Growth Management agreed to renegotiate the deal. Initially Peters had hoped to be seeking bids for expansion work in September, but that hasn't happened yet and the delay has added a likely half-million dollars to the cost of the project.

On Nov. 14, City Attorney Denis Fitzgibbons presented a revised agreement to the city, explaining that it would only lock the city into the current fee rate until the council decided to raise fees by a legislative act.

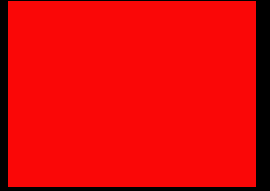
Council member Bonnie Palmer and Vice Mayor Gilbert Lopez proposed stipulations that the city only pre-sell permits to developers who were ready to build houses within the next two years, and that city staff be allowed to pre-sell more permits if the cost of the project increased again.

"We can certainly negotiate only with those builders we believe are able to build in the next two years," Fitzgibbons agreed.

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