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City considers new fee

BARABOO - For a little more than a year, fees on new housing have generated money for parks in Baraboo. Now some want to apply that system to the public library as well.

Impact fees, as they're called, charge new developments for their increased demand on public services. In the case of the library, population growth will bring more users and the need for a bigger library. Impact fees could pay for an addition to the building.

Library Board member Wayne Maffei said the board commissioned two space studies in recent years which predicted a need for future expansion.

"The report was that we were significantly undersized," Maffei said. "The population in Baraboo is growing, we've got increased circulation. It's a success story is what it is."

Board members considered impact fees because it is not fair to make current taxpayers foot the bill for an addition caused by new residents, Maffei said.

The money could only be used for new construction or building improvements, Library Director Richard MacDonald said, not materials or salaries.

He said about a dozen libraries in Wisconsin collect the fees, including Kenosha, McFarland, Oregon and New Berlin. Baraboo could only assess the fees to city residents, though non-city residents also use the library, he said, and an exception could be made for low-income housing.

Overall, the fee would give the library some options when it comes time to expand, MacDonald said.

"It certainly sounds like a good idea, and it's been successful with parks," he said.

Others object to impact fees because they add to the cost of new housing. Christine Schwanke, spokesperson for the Wisconsin Builders Association, said developers who pay the fees will pass that cost on to the home buyer.

"It's really affecting people's ability to afford a home," she said.

Park impact fees are \$807 for single-family homes and \$475 for multi-family homes, according to city ordinances. The fee is attached to building permits.

A draft study on library impact fees placed them at \$415 per dwelling if the city did not differentiate between single and multi-family housing. With the differential the cost would be \$439 per single family unit and \$339 per multi-family unit under the draft assessment, which is subject to change.

City Council members will take public comment on adopting library impact fees Aug. 23 at 7 p.m. in City Hall, 135 Fourth St. Library Board member Gene Clingman said even if the fees are instated, there are no immediate plans to expand the library. In two to five years board members could approve an addition, he said, but there is no interest in constructing an entirely new building.

"That is such a historic building, it would just be a shame to do that," Clingman said.

The library was built in 1903 and partially funded by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, according to an article by local historian Bob Dewel.

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