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City hearing to focus on impact fees

By RICK LAVENDER
The Times

Gainesville has taken more steps toward considering impact fees, with a public hearing set Tuesday on a potential projects list and a recent advisory committee's blessing on a blueprint of charges.

Both paths lead to City Council weighing whether to adopt the fees tagged to new construction and intended to offset the cost of growth. Still, any decision is months away.

Hall County began charging impact fees in 2003. Gainesville collects them in the city limits for Hall, though the share is only for jails and libraries, services the county provides.

But the city can charge for parks and recreation and public safety, adding to traditional revenue sources such as property and sales taxes.

A citizens advisory committee formed to explore that possibility approved a scale of suggested fees Thursday. They range from \$1,282 for new houses or apartments to \$100 per 1,000 square feet of industrial space.

State law requires, however, that the city first amend its comprehensive land-use plan to detail projects on which the dollars might be spent. The capital improvement element will be part of a hearing April 18 at the Planning Appeals Board Tuesday and City Council.

Following a state review that can take 60 days, council can vote to change its plan, City Manager Bryan Shuler said.

Then, the board can consider an impact fee ordinance.

Consultant Jerry Weitz recommended charges that are about a fourth of what the law allows. In his outline, the combined city/county fee for a single-family home will be \$1,615, with 1,000 feet of commercial space costing \$149, office space \$279 and industrial space \$158.

Those figures place Gainesville in the middle to low end of impact fees compared to Roswell, Alpharetta and Canton.

The fees would be paid when applying for a building permit, meaning approved mega developments such as the 600-plus acre Mundy Mill project under construction near Oakwood will be included.

Advisory committee member and Gainesville developer Doug Carter said the group seconded the

What's next

Public hearings on capital improvements, comprehensive plan amendment spelling out eligible impact fee projects:

- 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Gainesville Planning and Appeals Board, Georgia Mountains Center, 301 Main St.
- 5:30 p.m. April 18, City Council, Georgia Mountains Center. Council could vote to send element for state review.
- State review of the capital improvement element can take up to 60 days.



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plan and forwarded it to council, but asked for more analysis on financial projections and other issues. The committee did not support adding 3 percent for administrative costs.

"My concern is that (impact fees) not be a hindrance to our efforts with economic development," Carter said.

The committee is expecting some answers from Weitz even as it turns to drafting a proposed ordinance, with the help of planning staff.

Also due are more public meetings and city efforts to get the word out about impact fees. That's something the committee stressed, Carter said.

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