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Sunday, May 28, 2006

**City mulls new development fees**

**Proposed fees would jump between 46 to 81 percent**

By TATIANA PROPHET  
 Staff Writer

VICTORVILLE — Inflation and rapid development have prompted the city of Victorville to consider raising the fees it charges developers to build new projects.

In a draft report given to developers, the city announced an update to the existing development impact fees, or DIFs, that were first created in 2002 to offset the cost of public projects associated with population growth.

"The 2006 update of development impact fees is necessary in order to keep pace with increasing inflation and project costs," stated the report, prepared by consulting firm Agajanian & Associates. "... Project costs have increased substantially even over the last year."

The report proposes raising fees from the level that was voted on last year — before builders have even begun paying that amount. The 2006 fees were being charged in two doses, one on January 1 and one on July 1. On July 1, developers are scheduled to begin paying the following: \$9,595 per single-family dwelling unit, \$6,359 per multi-family dwelling unit, \$6.28 per square foot for commercial projects and \$1.24 per square foot for industrial projects.

In the meantime, the further fee hikes are being considered for a vote sometime this year by the council, said city spokeswoman Yvonne Hester.

For single-family units, the proposed fee would jump 52 percent to \$14,578. For multi-family, the fee would increase 61 percent to \$10,224. For commercial projects, the fee would go to \$11.37 a square foot. And for industrial projects, the increase would be 46 percent, to \$3.93 a square foot.

Before the matter goes to a vote, Hester said, a workshop will be scheduled in July for developers to meet with the city and discuss the details.

Terry Caldwell, a city council member, said rising costs have taken everyone by surprise.

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"The cost of land has just escalated dramatically because of the growth in the High Desert. ... It's no different than you going to a gas station to buy gas, you know — 'How can my gas bill go up so dramatically?' And the answer is everything is going up so dramatically."

The report estimates growth out to the year 2020 and spreads the fees over development projects during that time period. The biggest user of impact-fee money is the parks system with \$155 million in fees going to parks over the next 14 years.

Developers are saying, "Ouch!"

Jim Tatum, president of American Housing Group, said he could understand that the cities need money.

"Unfortunately, no agency has a lot of money anymore. You're not going to get any out of Washington, out of the state."

Todd Tatum, vice president of the company, said rapid fee hikes make it difficult to do business.

"You'd hate to go to your bank now and say, 'Here's how much I need.' Now we're paying double. If it's going up 100 percent annually, I think we need to say no."

Although homes in the High Desert are still more affordable than everywhere else, fees are slowly adding more to the price, Todd Tatum said, adding that total government fees cost his company \$50,000 a home.

"All of a sudden, we're not the affordable place anymore," said Jim Tatum.

Donald Brown, president of the Inland Empire North's office of Lee & Associates, said he is concerned that an 81 percent increase will send retail developers elsewhere.

"Eventually we're going to strangle the goose that is laying the golden egg, and that has been the retail business in the city of Victorville," he said, adding, "We have to sit down as a city, as a team effort, the development community and the city of Victorville, and discuss this."

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