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City wants $3000 impact fee, cools to one for schools

Posted on 27 October, 2005, by bcpress

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Macclenny officials gave preliminary approval to a $3000 impact fee for new residential construction Tuesday night, then asked the city attorney to determine whether they could legally refuse to enact a fee for the Baker County School Board.

Through informal discussions, school district representatives have asked the city to assess and collect an impact fee for education. County commissioners have already tentatively agreed to do so, although the school board has yet to propose an amount.

"We have never been involved in their funding process and I don't want to be involved now unless it's mandated," said Mayor Gary Dopson.

"What statute prevents the school board from assessing and collecting its own fees? I'd like to have more details on that."

City attorney Frank Maloney said he'll issue an opinion letter before the commission's next meeting, which is November 8.

Commissioner Vernon Bennett said he will vote against implementing a fee for the school board "unless someone can show me different."

He also railed against the district for not sending someone to the city meeting. Earlier in the week, a school board representative indicated someone would be there.

City manager Gerald Dopson said he was told they all had conflicts, to which Commissioner Bennett replied incredulously, "...they have an assistant superintendent, principals and administrators... somebody can be here to represent the school board."

The commission's reluctance to enact an education impact fee was apparently fueled by the belief the city would have to lower its fee.

"I'm not in favor of cutting this back just to add the school board," Mr. Dopson said. "Our responsibility is here, to the people of Macclenny."

Impact fees, levied on new construction, are intended to help pay for the additional roads, schools, police and fire services needed to accommodate growth.

There are rules governing when, where and how much can be spent, and the fees must be justifiable.

Consultant Frank Darabi of Gainesville recommended an identical amount of $2777 for the city, county and Glen St. Mary.

County commissioners, however, decided to forego his suggestion, and tentatively approved a fee of $1500. The Town of Glen is included in the

county's ordinance.

The school board's consultant said the district could justify a fee of up to $5068, but in informal discussions members have contemplated $1000. While the city's impact fee will be apportioned among transportation, law enforcement, emergency services, fire services and recreation, the county's $1500 fee is all for transportation, and the school board's would be of course for education, such as new schools and buses.

Mr. Maloney will draft an ordinance incorporating the $3000 impact fee approved Tuesday night, then forward it to Mr. Darabi for vetting. The city must hold two readings of the proposed ordinance at least ten days apart.

Officials will likely schedule a special meeting in order to pass the fee as quickly as possible.

The $3000 fee is about 10 percent higher than Mr. Darabi's recommendation, the difference being an increased amount for emergency services, from $300 to $464, and a $59 administrative fee.

In addition to the residential fee, the commission set prices for other types of development. Hotels and motels will be assessed $588 per room, hospitals and nursing homes $735 per bed, and office buildings, commercial and industrial will be $1.18 per square foot.

Commissioners are seeking a way to prevent a run on building permits to beat enactment of the ordinance.

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