

THE ASPEN TIMES

City's proposed impact fees strict, unique

By Kimberly Nicoletti

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Aspen is considering new and increased impact fees that would not only inflate the cost of new construction but also set the city apart in its fee structure.

The City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission on Tuesday requested a revised draft report on fees based on the number of bedrooms, rather than units, a development has. Tom Pippin, president of BBC Research & Consulting of Denver, will present the new draft in a couple of weeks, he said.

Impact fees are one-time charges on new developments to maintain the level of service a city offers as growth continues. Currently the city assesses a parks and recreation fee and a school land dedication requirement in which developers can pay cash to the school district rather than donate land.

The new proposal would double the parks and recreation fee to about \$7,100 for a four-bedroom house. The fee would be more than twice what Pippin has seen anywhere in Colorado, but he noted that Aspen has much more invested in its parks, recreation, open spaces and trails than other communities.

If adopted, two additional charges also would make Aspen's new impact fee structure unique: one for transportation and air quality impacts and another for stormwater drainage. Pippin knows of only one other jurisdiction in the western United States - an area between Los Angeles and San Diego - that charges a fee for air quality. He also said stormwater drainage impact fees are rare in Colorado.

However, he said communities that adopt impact fees usually grow faster because of their commitment to maintaining a high standard of living. The only exceptions tend to be cities that compete to attract retail or housing, such as Loveland and Longmont, he said. Competing cities often decrease their impact fees as an incentive for new development.

But that's not necessary in Aspen. As Planning and Zoning Commissioner Steve Skadron pointed out, Aspen is a community of luxury properties, so why not charge the maximum fees?

But the city isn't out to gouge developers, officials said.

"It's really a sustainability matter," Mayor Helen Klanderud said. "We have a lot of talk about whether this community can sustain itself. I think [the impact fee] is essential. If you are growing, you better be able to pay for it."

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