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Clermont home fees could jump by 61%

New-home buyers could pay almost \$17,000 in city and county impact fees.

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CLERMONT -- Lake County's most-populated city is considering several large impact-fee increases to offset demands from its enormous growth.

The proposal will raise fees that Clermont charges for newly constructed homes by as much as 61 percent -- to \$7,502. Fees on commercial and industrial buildings also could go up.

Combined with Lake County's impact fees, new-home buyers could pay nearly \$17,000 on top of costs to buy their properties. But city officials say their fees are sorely needed to help build new fire and police facilities, water and sewer utilities, and parks and recreational areas -- all of which are heavily impacted by hefty development.

The City Council agreed Tuesday night to vote on increasing all impact fees at a meeting scheduled for 7 p.m. Nov. 8 at City Hall. If approved, the new fees would take effect in January.

The proposal would raise impact fees for parks and recreational facilities about 210 percent -- from \$673 to \$2,087 -- for the average new home built in the city. Officials say that dramatic increase is needed partly to cover the rising land costs in south Lake.

Existing recreational areas are becoming more heavily used with so many new residents moving into the area, council member Ray Goodgame said.

"We have to acquire property so we can have another park facility," Goodgame said. "This is something our area badly needs, and I think it will serve the community well."

The city currently has jobs for 45 police officers to serve a population of more than 20,000 people. About 71 officers will be needed by 2020, when the population is expected to top 35,000, according to a

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city report.

Clermont's proposal would help to pay for new buildings and equipment for those officers by raising police impact fees 147 percent next year from \$185 to \$457.

Fire impact fees would go up 65 percent from \$194 to \$321. Goodgame said Clermont already is planning to build its third fire station -- possibly on its east or north side, where new homes and businesses are quickly building.

The city's water and sewer fees would increase between 11 percent and 29 percent to \$4,637.

Council member Elaine Renick agreed that impact fees are needed to help Clermont pay for key capital expenses such as new buildings, land and equipment. But they will not cover another huge impact of growth -- paying for more city staff to provide the growing public services.

Renick said impact fees don't cover the cost of operating new facilities.

"You can build a fire station and buy a firetruck, but the cost of running a fire station and the salaries and maintenance is not covered by impact fees," she said.

The proposed increase is the first time Clermont has considering overhauling impact fees in several years.

The city started charging impact fees in 1991. Fees were updated in 1998, and they have slowly increased 1 percent to 3 percent each year since then to accommodate the city's growth, city officials said.

From 1990 to 2000, Clermont's population grew by 35 percent. But the number of residents soared 114 percent between 2000 and this year to top 20,000.

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