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Commissioners hear impact fee study

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Summary:

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Impact fees are a method of funding infrastructure needed because of a community's growth. The county adopted impact fees in 2005 as a way to impose a "proportionate share of costs needed" for infrastructure improvements, such as roads.

Impact fees are collected for new homebuyers and are currently \$7,194 for a single-family home.

Carson Bise with the consulting firm of TischlerBise presented the impact fee study to commissioners, who didn't seem impressed.

Commissioner Vera Jones questioned what she said were "inconsistencies" in the study, including changing figures in revised reports.

"I'm not confident with this report," Jones said.

Two studies were presented, one recommending an increase of \$6,723. The second study presented less of an increase in the fees, at \$2,038, but required a \$13 million investment in water and sewer upgrades.

The investment would increase capacity at the plants, lowering the per-gallon cost of providing the service and lowering the impact fee needed.

Spending millions up front to save on impact fees didn't make much sense to Jones and other commissioners. "You don't figure out how to spend \$14 million more," Jones said.

County Attorney Gotwalt reminded commissioners there is no requirement they approve the fees recommended in the study.

"Impact fees presented represent the maximum support," Gotwalt said.

Some developers in recent months have grumbled over Effingham County's impact fees, saying nearby counties have lower rates, making them more attractive for building.

Commissioner Phil Kieffer also asked about the possibility of doing away with impact fees.

Kieffer later said using another type of fee, such as a tap fee or aid to construction, would give the county flexibility.

"It's not something we are pushing hard," Kieffer said. "But (without impact fees) we'd be able to move with the economy and meet the market."

Impact fees are governed by the development impact fee act and restricts how a county can use the funds.

Gotwalt said while there are other methods to fund infrastructure, impact fees go toward more than water and sewer debt.

"Then there is no other option for roads and public safety," Gotwalt said.

Of the current \$7,194 impact fee, roads, parks and recreation and public safety receive about \$1,500 that would have to be replaced.

Impact Fees collected in Fiscal Year 2010	Public Facility	Road/Bridges	Parks/Recreation	Public Safety					
Total for RPP	Water tap fees	Sewer tap fees	Impact Fees	\$538,576.41	\$124,394.88	\$75,486.33	\$738,457.62	\$346,364.00	\$376,548.00
Impact Fees collected in Fiscal Year 2009	Public Facility	Road/Bridges	Parks/Recreation	Public Safety					
Total for RPP	Water tap fees	Sewer tap fees	Impact Fees	\$255,962.61	\$36,160.00	\$27,640.50	\$319,763.11	\$87,332.00	\$96,300.00
Impact Fees collected in Fiscal Year 2008	Public Facility	Road/Bridges	Parks/Recreation	Public Safety					
Total for RPP	Water tap fees	Sewer tap fees	Impact Fees	\$282,613.80	\$88,234.88	\$47,845.83	\$418,694.51	\$259,032.00	\$280,248.00

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