

## Commissioners await CIAC's impact fee recommendation

[By Emma Perez-Trevino, The Brownsville Herald](#)

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The City Commission expects to receive a recommendation soon on an impact fee that if it approves would be assessed to developers to subsidize the infrastructure cost to meet new development needs.

Lee Ann Greer, chairwoman of the Capital Improvement Advisory Committee, did not provide a specific date for the commission at its meeting Tuesday, but indicated that it would be in the near future.

"This has been a learning process for everyone, and I think we see the light at the end of the tunnel," Greer told the commission.

The then-commission in 2006 increased impact fees from \$280 per lot to \$2,133, but then reverted to the \$280 fee in place since the 1990s. Some said more study was required while others said that commissioners buckled under pressure from developers.

The CIAC, as the committee is known, is charged with overseeing the process of recommending impact fees, Greer pointed out.

Greer said that the CIAC attempted to find a way to conduct the study and process "cheaper and quicker," but said that at the end, "there are no shortcuts."

The impact fees are based on the city's projected growth in the next 10 years, land-use assumptions, and a capital improvement plan.

The last of two public hearings on the proposed property tax increase were also held Tuesday.

The proposal calls for increasing the property tax rate by .032627 cents from the present .650517 cents per \$100 of assessed property valuation to .683114 cents.

This would bring a 5 percent increase, but almost a 7 percent increase from the effective rate, which generates the same revenues as this year under the new and higher property valuations.

The commission is slated to approve a tax rate and operating budget for the new fiscal year, beginning Oct. 1, at its meetings Sept. 15 and Sept. 16.

Deputy City Manager Pete Gonzalez said the increase would generate slightly more than \$1 million. Amid indication from the commission that it would like more detail on the proposed budget, Gonzalez said an increase is required due to high insurance costs and collective bargaining with police and firefighters.

"This is what is causing us to have the problems that we are having now," Gonzalez said.

Referring to the proposed tax increase, Commissioner Anthony Troiani noted that, "I don't think I have enough information to make that decision." At Troiani's suggestion, the city will

schedule a budget workshop for next week, prior to the Sept. 15-16 votes.

City Manager Charlie Cabler and Gonzalez seemed to resist an in-depth review of the proposed budget. No public workshops have been held on the budget and Gonzalez has rehashed the same limited budget information during several meetings.

Cabler said that 72 percent of the budget goes for personnel. "It is basically a payroll. That is what our budget is," Cabler said.

Gonzalez noted that there would be "quite a bit to go over" and that, "it's going to be a lot of paperwork," noting that he could spend the whole day on it if that is what the commission wants.

Commissioner Charlie Atkinson said that the commission needs to think, "out of the box," and come up with alternatives to a tax increase, such as increasing the amount of money that the Brownsville Public Utilities Board contributes to city operations. PUB now contributes 10 percent of its profits and Atkinson suggested that another five percent be assessed.

Mayor Pat M. Ahumada Jr. countered that this would create chaos in the bond market because bond covenants specifically address the contribution to the city.

Commissioner Edward Camarillo said that the budget should be thoroughly reviewed, even if the commission has to go line item by line item to see where savings could be realized or if fees should be adjusted.

Impact fee studies:

- 1990: R. W. Beck and Associates recommended \$2,133 per lot. Study cost about \$200,000.
- 2006: Black & Veatch recommended \$3,090 per lot. Study cost about \$220,000.
- 2007: Financial consultant Economists.com was contracted by the former City Commission majority to study the effects of impact fees for \$70,000, but a present commission majority stopped the study, saying it was evolving into a study on impact fee rates and could not be used without an engineering stamp.
- 2007: Black & Veatch began conducting another study that is underway. The cost is roughly \$134,000.
- Total spent on studies since 1990: \$624,000

Source: Public records