



Consultant says Ascension should impose transportation impact fee to meet growth

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GONZALES -- An Ascension Parish transportation impact fee should be phased in and require that all bear some of growth's cost, a parish consultant said Tuesday.

"The first rule of any impact fee is everybody pay their fair share across the board," said Jim Duncan, president of the Austin, Texas, Duncan Associates.

His planning firm has created the baseline data from which a proposed parish impact fee is being drawn. He was at the meeting to speak to the committee hashing out the proposal as a draft of the fee ordinance was handed out.

Duncan warned that any exemptions should be carefully reviewed as well as additional fees for extraordinary costs. Ensuring that all parties are treated the same keeps things "apolitical," he said.

"One of the cardinal rules with impact fees is everybody has to be treated equally," Duncan said.

He also said the fees should be phased in so the market can adjust.

The draft, which is for discussion purposes only until a final document is ready for the Ascension Parish Council, calls for between \$1,489 to \$2,169 in fees per single-family home.

Under development for several months by a committee of builders, developers and business leaders, the draft also lays out a spread of fees according to other land uses, ranging from office and commercial buildings to schools and mobile home parks.

The proposed ordinance varies fee rates by land use and varies their calculation method: while single-family fees are based on home sizes of set ranges, fees for restaurants, stores and banks are assessed per 1,000 square feet.

Charles Landry, a Baton Rouge development lawyer who has moderated the committee's discussions, said the draft will be "tweaked" during the next 10 days and then brought back to the committee for final review.

Only after that will the document begin moving through the Ascension Parish Council and its committees, said Landry, a partner in the firm Jones Walker LLP and an attorney for The Advocate.

The council must approve the ordinance before it can take effect. Parish President Ronnie Hughes has called for the fees as a way to address the parish's growth-spurred congestion.

Described by Landry as the "rock star" of impact fee development, Duncan has had long experience in creating similar fee programs in Florida. He said the fee table set up for Ascension is based on the traffic different types of land uses can be expected to generate and the cost of building new roads in the Louisiana.

While the ordinance calls for applying the fees from large-scale development to construction on single lots, Duncan and Landry said the ordinance would allow credits for developers who make improvements for the public benefit. Those credits do not normally apply to internal subdivision roads, Duncan said.

Duncan also told the committee he was not in favor of an adequate public facilities ordinance because it would create a "de facto moratorium" on development in certain areas and, at the same time, cut off new revenue.

Public facilities ordinances tie development to areas where the infrastructure exists to support it and, conversely, hold off development where the infrastructure can't handle it.

"If you wait until infrastructure's there, you have to ask yourself how's it going to be paid for," Duncan said.

A citizen advocate recently called for such an ordinance before the council's Strategic Planning Committee as a way to help the parish school system and argued the ordinance wouldn't slow growth. Under some plans, developers can build if they mitigate their impact.

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