

Weatherford Telegram

Council leaves impact fees intact

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Developers will continue to pay impact fees when building homes in new additions in Weatherford.

City Council members voted 4-1 not only to leave impact fees as they are, but also to take another look at them in the future to see if they should be increased.

That vote came in response to Councilman Jerry Clinton, who voted against the motion, and a group of developers led by John Rapkoch, who had asked for a moratorium on impact fees.

For a home with a 3/4-inch water meter, the impact fee is \$1,479. A 4-inch residential sewer impact fee is \$1,311. Building permits and other fees total \$1,209.

The impact fees represent 35 percent of the cost generated by the increase in demand on utilities introduced by each new home. In the motion that left impact fees intact, the council approved raising impact fees 5 percent per year until they reach 50 percent.

Council members heard from City Manager Jerry Blaisdell, Assistant City Manager Robert Hanna and others at its March 9 regular session on how important impact fees are to continued delivery of services to the city's utility customers. But one voice stood a head taller than the others.

Howard McClurkin told the council that developers who asked for an impact fee moratorium actually are asking to make a claim on the incomes of Weatherford utility rate payers.

"They're asking the ratepayers to subsidize new real estate development by increasing the cost of utilities paid by the rate payers," he said. "To put it succinctly it's a transfer of dollars from the citizens of Weatherford pockets into the pockets of real estate developers."

McClurkin said he believes developers should pay their own way just as anyone else doing business in the city.

"If the developers have a valid claim on the income of the citizens of Weatherford, does not the man who sells tires, the restaurant that sells hamburgers and the boutique that sells ladies' dresses have a claim on the income of the citizens of Weatherford?" he asked rhetorically. "No business should have such a claim. It's ludicrous."

As a former real estate developer, McClurkin said he has insight into the business, "and I have no sympathy for anyone who wants to pick grandma's pocket simply for them to make more money. That's wrong."

Hanna said that, at the current rate of all building permit and inspection fees, the city probably will recover 24 percent of the cost related to building inspections and plan reviews this year.

He said that Weatherford's impact fees are in the middle of 22 cities studied in the Metroplex. Weatherford's building permit fees are the second lowest.

And, when comparing the number of building permits issued by all of the cities in the last year, Weatherford is one of the highest. That contrasted with Rapkoch's accusation that fees imposed on developers have driven them out of the city.

Indeed, the city with the highest impact fees, Colleyville, also had the highest number of new building permits, Hanna said.

He also pointed out that some cities charge road fees, which Weatherford does not.

In closing discussions, Councilman Waymon Hamilton said that the most obvious facet of the hearing was that if impact fees aren't assessed, the cost of new residential development will be borne by ratepayers.

"I feel we should leave it as it is," he said.

Councilman James Hamilton agreed.

"We have a responsibility to be partners in development, but not to underwrite or subsidize development," he said.

Being partners in development is the idea behind another aspect of an ordinance that city staff was tasked by the council with drafting. Weatherford can do what Rapkoch asked and more through an infill development policy.

The city not only could abate impact fees, but also could provide financial incentives for builders who fill-in blank spaces in existing neighborhoods, Hanna said.

Lots that were never built on, or lots on which abandoned dwellings or other buildings have degraded past the point of reclamation, would qualify for the policy, he explained.

"It helps the community revitalize, and rebuilds neighborhoods," Hanna said in a Feb. 17 *Weatherford Telegram* article that introduced the policy.

Mayor Dennis Hooks clarified a motion made by Councilman Craig Swancy.

"We leave fees as they are with the ability to look later at increasing them," he said. "As we get to the 50 percent level the council would like the opportunity to raise them if members see fit to do so at that time."

Hanna made sure the staff understood the council's intent.

"You want to keep the graduated implementation in place and you want us to bring you an ordinance identifying the city's north side as an impact zone for infill," he said.

Four council members agreed.

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