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Council struggles with fee options

New tax would offset road and growth costs

By Aliana Ramos

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The city of Georgetown has three options when it comes to charging developers a countywide impact fee in order to build new roads and streetscape improvements.

City Council can vote to opt out of the countywide program, create its own impact fee or go along with the Georgetown County Council's recommended fee formula, city administrator Steve Thomas said.

No decisions were made during Tuesday's joint meeting between the city and county councils.

Georgetown County has been working for about a year to develop a transportation impact fee to help pay for about \$50 million in road improvement projects by 2025.

After Tuesday's joint meeting, consultants presented the county council with early projections for a road user fee.

Preliminary road impact fees could be roughly \$1,100 for a single-family detached home in the western part of the county and \$1,480 for a single-family detached home in the Waccamaw Neck area, said County Administrator Sel Hemingway.

The fee would be levied on all new businesses and homes to help defray the costs of growth. "I do think there's some benefits to be derived," said Hemingway about a partnership between the city and county.

If the city chose to do its own impact fee, it also would have to pay the full cost of a capital improvement plan study, he said.

Hemingway said he expects to see the final numbers by early August.

Thomas and City Councilman Paige Sawyer said it is too early to tell what is in the city's best interest. There are still too many things to consider.

For one, opting out of the program altogether could provide a powerful tool to attract developers, Sawyer and Thomas said.

"The city may be able to better position to attract development if we don't have the fee and the county does," Sawyer said.

City Council is expected to meet again on July 24, but Thomas said it is unlikely the impact fee issue will be resolved then.

"We want to receive more information. We need more of a handle on what the capital projects are for our area," Thomas said.

"What are the calculations? We need to know how much they propose collecting on each new residential unit. We need to know the numbers. We need to know how much input that our city council will have on county's capital wish list. How much say-so will our city council have in how those dollars are spent?" Contact ALIANA RAMOS at 357-9520.