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News

Council tables decision on a transportation impact fee

Safford Special Projects Manager Robert Porter was prepared to deliver a presentation on a streets capital improvement plan and a proposed transportation impact fee and give his recommendations to the council, but they did not wish to hear Porter's report. Instead, Mayor Ron Green chose to give the floor to developer Heavy Owens while some members of the council, such as Vice Mayor Jason Kouts, openly stated they would not be voting in favor of the impact fee. Kouts' construction company is a subcontractor to build homes for Owens. He said he spoke with interim City Attorney William J. Sims and asked if that relationship would constitute a conflict of interest before voicing his opinion on the issue. Kouts said Sims assured him he did not have a conflict.

A transportation im-pact fee would be added to the total cost of a home and would ultimately be paid by the new homeowners who create the traffic impact in the first place. Owens said he saw the need for a transportation impact fee but does not agree with the recommendation from the Dan Jackson Economists' study of a maximum allowable fee. He suggested a fee of about \$900 would be acceptable, especially if the council amended the impact fees for water and wastewater.

The cost for the 20-year timeframe streets capital improvement plan is approximately \$29.3 million. Porter said while the studies indicate the entire plan needs to be addressed to keep traffic moving in the future, he also gave alternative plans using either 25 percent, 50 percent or 75 percent of an alternative fee. Porter's report recommended the council approve the 75 percent of the alternative fee to raise approximately \$15.4 million over 20 years.

Councilors Jason Foutz, Ken Malloque and Jerry Hancock all said they felt that approving a transportation impact fee without amending previous impact fees would be too costly.

"Safford's kind of the laughingstock and no subdivisions want to move here because to build a house here in Safford will cost them (developers) \$15,000 to \$20,000 more than building one a mile and a half down the road," Foutz said.

In reality, the only difference in impact fees between Thatcher and Safford is a \$2,245 wastewater impact fee, according to Porter's report. A fee that developers in Thatcher may soon see as well due to the age and size of its current wastewater wetlands and the town's need to either build a treatment facility or tap into Safford's, according to Safford Utilities Director Jay Howe.

If the council had allowed Porter to give his presentation, it would have learned his recommendation of a \$1,643 transportation impact fee for single family residential would add less than one percent to the cost of a \$180,000 home.

Councilors Hancock and Richard Ortega brought up the suggestion of looking into a countywide half-cent sales tax to help improve the roads throughout Safford and the county as well.

The council agreed to table the matter of accepting the streets capital improvement plan and staff's recommendation of a transportation impact fee until they can have a work session on the topic.

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