



www.bellinghamherald.com

GROWTH

Council backs park impact fee

Plans call for adding up to 45% of park costs onto new homes

**AUBREY COHEN
THE BELLINGHAM HERALD**

New homes should pay for a portion of new park facilities needed to serve them, Bellingham City Council members said Monday.

"We need to get it done quick," Councilman Gene Knutson said in endorsing a plan to charge new homes park impact fees. "I think it's long overdue."

City Parks and Recreation Department officials said they would bring a formal proposal back by the end of the year.

A parks plan the council adopted in 2002 called for charging new homes 35 percent of what it would cost to add enough park facilities to keep pace with growth. Last year, the Planning Commission recommended charging 45 percent.

Officials put the proposal on hold while updating the city's comprehensive plan. That update is not done, but council members wanted to move forward on the fee anyway, parks planner Leslie Bryson said.

The plan says the city would need \$10,083 in park facilities per household to keep up with growth - meaning a fee of \$3,529 per household at 35 percent and \$4,537 at 45 percent.

Bryson and Parks and Recreation Director Paul Leuthold on Monday asked if council members agreed with charging fees and, if so, which percentage they preferred.

Grant Deger and Bob Ryan were the only council members to express reservations about a fee.

PARKS FEE SURVEY

A Bellingham survey of 200 voters in 2002 found 61 percent strongly agreed with the idea of funding new park facilities needed to keep pace with growth by charging a fee on new homes.

In addition to those voters, who gave parks impact fees a 5 on a 1-to-5 scale, another 18 percent gave such fees a 4. Other options were lowering the city's park standard, charging a fee on commercial development and raising taxes.

Asked how high the fee should be in terms of the amount needed to keep up with growth:

- 11 percent of the voters said the fee should cover 100 percent of the cost.

"I'm having a hard time adding \$3,500 to the cost of housing in Bellingham," Deger said, noting that the city recently raised other development fees.

"I hope our children can afford to buy a house here," he said.

The only council member to comment on the fee level was John Watts, who said, "35 percent seems a reasonable start."

- 9 percent said 75 percent.
- 24 percent said 50 percent.
- 21 percent said 25 percent.
- 16 percent said 10 percent.
- 9 percent said none.

Leuthold said state law did not allow charging 100 percent of the cost to keep up with growth, and charging more than proposed would not be fair because facilities funded by the fees would not be just for those in the new homes.

"These are public parks," he said. "They're going to be utilized by the entire community."

State law says impact fees can go only to improvements reasonably related to new development and may not exceed the share of costs related to the development.

Officials are looking into a fee that would vary based on the type of home and divide money evenly between citywide facilities and those serving just the local area - based on dividing the city into four sections.

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

www.bellinghamherald.com

[print](#) • [back](#)