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## County to consider future of road impact fees

GENEVA – With the local economy still mired in the doldrums, Kane County's government could soon decide whether the county should continue charging those building new businesses and homes to help pay to improve county roads.

On Tuesday, the Kane County Board took up the discussion of whether to approve the county's road impact fee ordinance.

For the past seven years, the impact fee program has collected \$22 million from developers and others building new structures in the county. That money has been used to pay for a range of improvements to county highways, including work on Kirk Road at its intersections with Route 38 and Route 56, on Orchard Road, on Randall Road and on Stearns Road, among many others, said Steve Coffinbargar, assistant director of the Kane County Division of Transportation.

Every five years, the county is obligated by state law to revise its transportation improvement plans.

That process includes reviewing and modifying, if necessary, its road impact fee ordinance.

Coffinbargar said the county is obligated by state law to take action on the ordinance in April, after a special advisory panel of county officials, mayors, developers, labor representatives and others recommended in February that the board renew its impact fee program.

Under the revised ordinance, the county would hold the thousands of dollars in fees charged for new development essentially flat.

To accomplish that, Coffinbargar said county staff modified the proposal by inserting a 50 percent multiplier, essentially cutting the gross calculated fees in half, and holding the fees actually paid by developers at levels calculated five years ago.

"We suggested the multiplier to keep the fees consistent with where they are now," Coffinbargar said.

Some on the board, however, questioned whether the county, amid the current economic environment, should even be charging those fees to developers building new stores, factories, office buildings or other business-related structures.

County board member T.R. Smith, R-Maple Park, said he had "received an awful lot of correspondence" from local community leaders in western Kane County asking the county to rework the ordinance to remove the fees from new businesses or eliminate the ordinance altogether.

"They believe this ordinance is driving business out of the county, into neighboring counties," Smith said.

Smith and board members Melisa Taylor, R-Sugar Grove, and Christina Castro, D-Elgin, questioned whether Kane's fees are too high because only DuPage County, among Kane's neighbors, charged impact fees at all.

"This will greatly affect anything going on at the edges of the county," said Taylor. "Why would they want to touch those fees?"

Others on the county board defended the fees, noting that eliminating the fees would leave the county with only local tax money to pay for road work and pay the local match payments required to obtain federal and state road work grants.

Board member Jesse Vazquez, D-Aurora, said his community's leaders urged him to continue the program, noting the boost in local employment fostered by county highway improvements.

And board member Jim Mitchell, R-North Aurora, said the impact fees have provided "a tremendous benefit" to the county's transportation system.

"Who should pay for these road improvements?" Mitchell said. "Taxpayers? Or the businesses coming into the county?"

"It should be the businesses coming in."

He said businesses will choose to locate in Kane County because it holds many advantages over other counties in the region.

"So LaSalle County doesn't have an impact fee," Mitchell said. "But you don't see anybody going there."

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