



County set to consider impact fees

02/22/2006 -

County raises rates on services

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LAWRENCEVILLE — Bob Griggs has talked about charging developers for growth for nearly a decade. Now, officials are poised to listen.

Commissioners voted to have Griggs, a homeowner activist who runs politically active Web sites, and eight other homeowners and business and civic leaders study impact fees, a controversial method to pay for infrastructure in the rapidly growing county.

"I'm hoping we can move past the myths and misconceptions and get to the meat of the matter," Griggs said of the study group, which begins meeting next week. "The whole purpose of an impact fee is to require new development to pay for itself, so the folks who are already here don't have to. It's only right that the person who generates that need pays for it."

After several commissioners made a study of the fees a priority during a retreat late last year, the board voted unanimously Tuesday to get started.

"I think it's high time we studied this issue thoroughly," District 1's Lorraine Green said.

Because of constitutional questions, officials concentrated on sales and property taxes to fund Gwinnett's growing needs, such as parks, roads and libraries.

Several years ago, the Supreme Court ruled in a Cherokee County case that developer impact fees are allowed, but the funds must be used to directly benefit the area where the fees are paid.

District 4 Commissioner Kevin Kenerly, who proposed the study, said he doesn't look at Cherokee County as a shining example.

Since the fees began, the county has lost about 5,000 acres to annexation into cities without such fees and for two new developments recently OK'd, the county waived the fees, Kenerly said.

With Gwinnett working to try to draw businesses to the area and a constant schedule of annexations to local cities already, Kenerly said he's not sure how impact fees will work.

"Let's go through the facts before we say this is the savior," he said.

"I'm curious what stones they are going to unturn and the answers they'll find," District 3 Commissioner Mike Beaudreau said.

While District 2's Bert Nasuti said he doesn't believe the fees would raise enough money to replace county sales taxes and property taxes, he said the fees could help raise government revenues.

Also Tuesday, officials raised fees on numerous county services and permits — from a 20 cent boost per month for E-911 service to making the adult entertainment permit fee 12 times higher.

"Our expenses never go down," Nasuti said. "When you can increase fees, it does offset expenses, but it's better to raise it on a nominal basis than wait and then raise it a lot."

The moves come after a study was conducted by the county's internal audit division.

The results showed residents and business owners paid less than the metro Atlanta average for many permits and services.

A study group of county department heads evaluated the results and recommended changes in several departments, including the cost of the county's work release program, ambulance service and alcohol licenses.

According to Warden Jim Kraus, who headed the work group, the fees in the county's parks and health and human services division and transportation department were on par with other metro agencies.

Fees for public utilities such as water and sewer and planning and development departments were not studied.

Fee Increases

Commissioners agreed Tuesday to boost several annual regulatory fees. The move came after an internal audit study showed, in many cases, the county's fees were less than the metro Atlanta average.

Former Fee	New Fee
Alcohol/Miscellaneous Fees	
Liquor Sales	\$4,000 \$4,500
Sunday Liquor Sales	\$500 \$1,000
Beer Sales	\$500 \$600
Beer Sunday Sales	\$85 \$250
Wine Sales	\$500 \$600
Sunday Wine Sales	\$85 \$250
Beer & Wine Sales	\$1,000 \$1,200
Sunday Beer & Wine Sales	\$125 \$500
Alcohol Serving	\$25 \$35
Adult Entertainment	\$25 \$300
Burglar/Security Alarm Installer	\$25 \$35
Canvasser/Solicitor	\$25 \$35
Criminal background Investigations	\$15 \$20
Escort/Dating	\$25 \$150
Fortune Telling/Related	\$25 \$100
Locksmith	\$25 \$35
Massage Therapist	\$25 \$150
Passenger Carrying Vehicle	\$25 \$45
Pawn Shop	\$25 \$35
Pawn Shop & precious Metals	\$25 \$35
Poolroom (no alcohol)	\$25 \$50
Precious Metals --- employee	\$25 \$35

Fire & Emergency Service Fees (each time)	
Advanced Life Support	\$250 \$350(resident)/ \$450(non-res.)
Basic Life Support	\$250 \$300(resident)/ \$350(non-res.)

9-11 fees (monthly)	
Landline	\$1.10 \$1.30
Wireless	\$0.80 \$1.00

Source: Gwinnett County Board of Commissioner