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Woodland Hills will impose impact fee for new homes

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**JEREMY DUDA** - Daily Herald

At the rate Woodland Hills is growing, the main road through town is going to need some improvements, and the City Council is asking incoming residents to pick up the tab.

The City Council on Tuesday voted unanimously to impose an \$11,000 impact fee for building permits on new homes to cover the cost of widening Woodland Hills Drive. New residents will not be charged the impact fee if they can show that their home would be in an area where they would not be using Woodland Hills Drive.

The revenue will be used to widen the road from 24 to 28 feet, giving it two 11-foot lanes and 4-foot shoulders.

The vote came on the heels of a study by Horrocks Engineers that said Woodland Hills Drive has reached its capacity. With an estimated 19 building permits for new homes expected to be approved this year and lots available for as many as 250 homes, the City Council decided to act quickly on the recommendation.

"I don't think it's a question of if, but when. It's got to be done," said city attorney Harold Mitchell, who presented the findings of the Horrocks report to the council.

The construction is estimated to cost \$750,000, with another \$1.6-3.3 million for drainage. Mayor Toby Harding said the city could get better estimates in the spring when it bids the project out for construction. The impact fee could also be adjusted at that point to accommodate the actual cost of construction.

The city plans to take out a bond so the project can be completed in 2007.

There was some debate over whether the city should impose a fee of \$15,800, the maximum allowed by law, or go lower than \$11,000. Enact too high a fee and Woodland Hills would be legally obligated to refund the excess amount. Conversely, if the number is too low to cover the full cost of construction, the city would have to find other ways to fund the project.

Harding recommended not imposing the maximum fee.

"If we start at a lower figure maybe we will not thwart as much development," he said.

After Councilman Steve Lauritzen made a motion to approve a \$10,000 impact fee,

Councilman Tom O'Grady said he worried that the council was going too low on the figure.

"We've got to do something now because our backs are against the wall. Maybe this is going to be enough and maybe it's going to work out right, but we're doing a lot of guesswork here," O'Grady said.

Woodland Hills resident Steve Carter supported erring on the side of caution as well.

"What's harder -- collecting more money after the fact ... or refunding some?" he asked. "Collect all you can, collect the maximum ... and refund with interest down the road."

Not everyone approved of the plan to have only new residents pay for the cost of upgrading Woodland Hills Drive. Helen Anderson of the Utah Valley Home Builders Association said that some of the cost should be covered by current residents because they will also benefit from the project.

"The road will have to be widened for the additional residents, but you're going to end up with a better road," she said. "It's just simply not fair to have only the owners of new homes pay for that full amount."

Harding said that the city would not be doing any work on the road if new residents were not moving in. Lauritzen added that new residents will get the benefits of infrastructure that current residents have already paid for.

"I don't think it's an issue of fair," Lauritzen said.

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