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PELL CITY

Council tables ordinance establishing impact fees

By David Atchison
 03-13-2007

PELL CITY – The City Council tabled a proposed ordinance Monday night that would establish capital recovery and impact fees for new water and sewer customers.

The council was expected to have the first reading of the ordinance at Monday night’s council meeting, but Mayor Adam Stocks said there was not enough time to complete the final draft.

City officials say fees established by the ordinance will only apply to new construction within the city, not existing customers, and could provide additional revenue the city needs to fix its sewer and water systems.

Stocks said the new fees could generate millions of dollars in revenue within the next six years, if the housing market remains strong in the city.

Councilman Gaston Williamson, who spearheaded efforts to establish new water and sewer fees, said the new fees are not as much as they are in other municipalities, but the city can generate additional revenue to help fix its aging water and sewer systems.

Last year, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management fined the city for violating the wastewater treatment permit at its Dye Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. ADEM also outlined enforcement actions the city must take to prevent future raw sewage discharges. The city has six years to fix problems causing sewer overflows throughout the city.

If corrective actions are not met by certain dates, the city could face substantial fines and penalties, up to \$300 a day.

It is estimated that it would cost the city about \$23 million to completely overhaul the sewer system alone.

Officials hope new sewer impact and water recovery fees will provide additional revenue needed to improve the city’s water and sewer

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"I do believe we need impact fees," Stocks said.

Councilmen Greg Gossett and Ed Pennington said they are not against impact fees, but they would vote against the proposed ordinance at the next council meeting, saying the new fees are too much, too fast.

Gossett said it's best to increase fees by a certain percentage each year, so developers aren't hit all at once.

"It's a pretty big jump," Gossett said, adding he believes sewer impact and water capital recovery fees need to be phased in slowly. "I don't think we should throw it all out there at once."

Pennington said fees need to be based on water fixtures, such as sinks, commodes, tubs, etc., instead of per structure fees.

He said under the proposed ordinance a large industry with many bathrooms is charged the same as a small business with only one sink and commode. He said the fees are not fair to small business owners who are charged the same as large corporations or industries, which will use the city's water and sewer systems more.

Under the proposed ordinance, developers or owners of new homes and businesses with three-fourth inch water lines would pay \$1,550 in capital recovery fees, in addition to the normal \$750 in water tap-on fee for city water.

The only increase in water tap-on fees is for irrigation lines and meters. Irrigation businesses with three-fourth inch lines will pay \$750, instead of the \$300 water tap-on charge, and irrigation businesses with one-inch lines or larger will pay \$1,000 instead of \$400 to tap on to the city's water system.

Currently, it costs developers \$400 for residential sewer connections, \$550 for commercial connections and \$750 for industrial sewer connections.

Under the proposed ordinance, developers/new homes or business owners using city sewer would pay a one-time \$2,300 sewer impact fee. There is no sewer connection fee under the proposed ordinance.

The ordinance also requires companies to provide a \$25,000 bond for boring or cutting any city street or road. And all damages to water and sewer lines would be the expense of the applicant. A service company is also charged a fine and hourly rate until the damage to water and/or sewer lines are rectified.

In other matters Monday night, the council:

O Approved an agreement with the county to renew a contract with Washington D.C., lobbyist Van Socoyoc Associates Inc. to represent both the city and county.



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O Accepted the resignation of Elsie Purvis from the JBS Metal Health/Retardation Authority Board.

O Approved the low bid submitted by Municipal & Commercial Uniforms for bulletproof vests for police officers in the amount of \$490 per vest.

O Tabled the final plats for the Twin Oaks development and approved the final plat for Hillstone residential development.

About David Atchison

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