

## DeKalb may adopt big hike in impact fees

*By Chris Rickert - City Editor*

DeKALB - A city council that has spoken favorably in the past of increasing the impact fees paid by housing developers will take up such a proposal tonight after a less-enthusiastic plan commission gave the measure a mixed recommendation last month.

The changes would increase existing fees and add new ones, more than tripling the amount a developer would have to pay on a new four-bedroom, single-family home to about \$18,000. Most significantly, the money collected would be used to help build schools and pay for other needs in the DeKalb School District. It also would be set aside for future city building projects and for park creation.

Community Development Director Russ Farnum said Thursday that his staff is “having an ongoing dialogue” about the fees with members of the DeKalb County Building and Development Association, which has spoken out against the increases.

He said the main disagreement between the city and the developers is over what demographic data should be used to calculate how many schoolchildren live in various kinds of new housing. That information is a key part of determining the level of impact fees.

But “finding more updated data is a monumental task,” Farnum said, adding that the city has agreed to revisit its main school impact fee levels in 2007.

Brian Grainger, president of the DCEDC, said the group has someone working full-time on getting what it considers more accurate student demographic data.

“It's taken longer than we've hoped,” he said.

The city is using data from last year's special census of parts of DeKalb to help it calculate the new school transition fee it is proposing. The fee is designed to cover the funding gap from when a new home is occupied with school-aged children to when property taxes on the home start to make their way to the school district.

But for its main set of school impact fees, the city relies on the so-called “Naperville formula,” a court-tested process for determining student populations in growing areas that has gained wide acceptance among Illinois municipalities.

It's unlikely the council would be considering higher fees had April's city election turned out differently. Recently elected Mayor Frank Van Buer campaigned largely on the theme that DeKalb had not done enough to plan for the costs of residential growth while under former Mayor Greg Sparrow.

And 4th Ward Alderwoman Donna Gorski defeated incumbent Mike Knowlton on a platform of stopping the approval of new housing projects and dramatically increasing impact fees.

Grainger said that no matter what the council does, his group will continue its work.

“I'm not sure what they'll do, but it won't really change our direction,” Grainger said.

Last month, the plan commission recommended the city adopt the types of fees being proposed by city staff, but declined to provide a recommendation on how high those fees should be.

Also tonight, the council will consider two ordinance changes designed to improve safety around Clinton Rosette Middle School.

The first would prohibit the drivers going north on First Street from turning right onto Sycamore Road when the traffic signal at the intersection is red. It also would make it illegal for drivers going southwest on Sycamore from turning right onto First Street when the signal is red.

The second would formally enact a 20-mph speed limit on First Street from Hillcrest Drive to Sycamore Road, directly in front of the school.

The council meets at 7 p.m. today at City Hall, 200 S. Fourth St.

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