

DeKalb triples new home fees

By Chris Rickert - City Editor

DeKALB - A five-month moratorium on new residential subdivisions will expire Wednesday after the city council approved a package of new and increased impact fees Monday night that will more than triple what developers - and, by extension, home buyers - pay on a new home.

Money collected will go to the DeKalb School District, DeKalb Park District and the city and is meant to pay for new schools, new parks, new roads, new city buildings and other needs that can reasonably be attributed to population growth.

Under the new package, the fees on a four-bedroom home, for example, would go from about \$4,800 to about \$18,000 and would put DeKalb on par with places like Elgin and Genoa in the amount it charges. Amid those DeKalb County communities that have impact fees, DeKalb had been among the lowest in what it charges.

“We missed many opportunities to assist our homeowners in this community,” said Fifth Ward Alderman Pat Conboy, a vocal backer of the increases who rejected assertions by some in the home-building community that impact fees have the effect of pricing existing residents out of the home-buying market. “We're doing what should have been done some years ago.”

The fees transfer the costs of needed new services to the people who move to DeKalb and buy new homes, he said, and it was “absolutely cockimangy wrong - if there is such a word - it's ludicrous” to suggest that supporters of the higher fees were out to hurt homeowners.

Developers have seen it differently, and as he's done in other recent public meetings, Mac McIntyre, executive officer of the DeKalb County Building and Development Association, questioned the legality of the fees and urged the council to consider each new or increased fee separately.

He argued that parts of the overall package - such as the implementation of a road impact fee - ran counter to state law, and asked if the decision to collect the roads fee through land annexation agreements wasn't a disingenuous mechanism.

“Is that not trying to skirt the law?” he asked. “Is that good government?”

DCBDA attorney Mike Coghlan also pointed out that the city is relying on what it admits might be an outdated formula to determine how many children are likely to live in new subdivisions - and thus how much in impact fees those subdivisions should pay.

The city's 2004 special census of neighborhoods that came into existence after the 2000 census is a

more accurate measure of how many school-aged children live in new homes, he said.

City Manager Mark Biernacki said the special census data “is not, in our opinion, applicable” when it comes to so-called “land-cash fees,” a traditional kind of impact fee meant to gauge how many children a new home will produce over a number of years, not just at the time of first occupancy.

Opponents of the fee increases saw the number of aldermen voting against the overall package double since the last time the council considered it two weeks ago.

Alderman Dave Baker, 6th Ward, voted for the fees on Nov. 14, but against the overall package Monday. James Barr, 7th Ward, voted against the increases both times.

Baker said he wasn't opposed to higher impact fees but did think each should be considered separately and in more detail, and suggested some might be phased in over time.

Barr also has voiced support for increasing the fees but has questioned the need to triple them and said Monday that combined with a new set of suggested residential design guidelines for builders - also approved Monday - “we're looking at a huge, huge cost” for developers and home buyers.

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