



Print this story

Developer fees go to council: € Decision made after joint committee meeting

Print Page

By Staff Reporter

JOHN V. CIANI/jciani@ridgecrestca.com

The Ridgecrest City Council Infrastructure and Economic Development committees voted last night to move a proposed resolution setting development-impact fees to the council.

The two committees held a second special joint meeting to continue discussion on the fees. The committees also met April 24.

Interim Planning Director Matt Alexander said the latest report contains several revisions. He said all references to the Base Realignment and Closure process were removed.

"The traffic-impact fees have been modified downward due to reducing estimated linear cost per mile from \$2.5 million per linear mile to \$1.75 million per linear mile."

Another proposal is a 50-percent reduction for most nonresidential uses and 90-percent reduction for gasoline stations.

Alexander added that nonresidential developments pay for the top three of the eight priorities of the city's master drainage plan. "The 1989 study is the base study to determine the formula for the drainage-impact fee."

The drainage-impact fee for industrial and commercial developments has been reduced from \$35,426 per acre to \$9,644 per acre, he said.

The resolution also includes an appeal process as well as a phase-in provision for developments that have already been approved, said Alexander. For example, if the total fees on a single-family residential development are \$5,919, the developer would pay 60 percent of the total fee if it is paid before Oct. 1, 80 percent if paid between Oct. 1 and Jan. 1, 2007 and 100 percent if paid after Jan. 1.

"The overall city of Ridgecrest capital-improvement required by new development over the next 10 years has been reduced from \$135.552 million to \$80.197 million," said Alexander.

Infrastructure Committee Chair Steve Morgan said the resolution also includes sections on collection and tracking of funds, use of funds and refunds.

"We have reduced the fees. We have done just about everything that people have asked of us to look into," he said. "New development does not pay for existing deficiencies, rather, new development pays its fair share of the costs to provide the required services and improvements for the projects they propose, which is what we have been saying all along."

Resident Ron Kocinski said he still believes there are small businesses that may be planning projects in the future that may stop. "A lot of businesses have been here a lot of years struggling to get to the point where they can maybe build something to fit their needs."

He said existing buildings may not meet their needs.

Morgan asked if the fees would apply to projects such as room additions.

"In the resolution we're going to be preparing for the council, new building additions of 1,000 square feet or less be exempt from developer-impact fees," Alexander responded.

"I think we're really close if we're not there," said developer James Bell. He asked about in-lieu provisions and the appeal process. "Do we have a path for an in-lieu-of discussion?"

"It's an option that state law makes available to the city," Alexander replied. "The one that's certainly been brought to our attention is the issue of drainage-impact fees."

He said the most common example is a sump that is placed on a subdivision to retain storm water thereby not contributing to the overall impact of storm water on the citywide system. Therefore the cost of developing the sump could be applied against the drainage fee for the subdivision.

"We have spent probably on the order of hundreds of thousands of dollars by the time it will be done building the retention basin which was calculated to retain all of the water that we would have created," said Bell.

Alexander said Wal-Mart contributes a major construction improvement to the Bowman Channel. "That would be a reasonable request to get some relief from the overall drainage fees because they're part of the citywide master drainage improvement. That in-lieu credit would have to go before the City Council."

He said other cities require their subdivisions to retain their own storm water and also require a citywide drainage-impact fee.

"Your drainage study is seriously flawed," said developer George Bertrand. He said several detention basins won't be done, others may be done, and right-of-way acquisition for the Mahan Channel won't happen, and site acquisitions for two College Heights detention basins were deleted because the developers are going to build those.

"That is why if the improvements are not made the money is refunded," said Morgan.

"Why charge them in the first place?" Bertrand asked.

"Because if we can make certain improvements to make it better sir, we're trying to do that," Morgan said.

Kicinski suggested that a new drainage study be completed.

Mayor Chip Holloway said part of the fees could be used for a capital-improvement plan study.

"Another plan should be put together," said resident Jerry Taylor. "I just don't see where costs are going to come down though. We can debate the validity of the plan, but in reality, this needs to go forward."

He also asked if the city is working with Kern County to get its fee structure in place.

"They are waiting for us," said Morgan.

"We have to do something now in terms of drainage, and the only master plan we have to work with, we put a lot of money into that plan," said Vice Mayor Dan Clark. "I look at the master plan, and I look at what we're trying to do here. Until we do another master plan,

I'm good with what we have."

"I'm concerned about in-lieu credits," said Infrastructure Member Lois Beres. "Suppose we're talking about in-fill."

Using the old Texas Instruments building as an example, she asked if a developer would receive in-lieu credit because the streets around the building are paved.

"Each case is going to be different, and you're going to have proponents of refurbishing existing buildings just sitting vacant," said Alexander. "If the building is vacant, then they are not generating any traffic. If someone tears it down and puts in a new building, they'd be generating more traffic. Even though the streets are built around it, you have to look at the citywide concern."

"We're here in 2006. The city is going to move forward," said Vice Mayor Duke Martin. "The fact of the matter is there's still major drainage situations in this town that have to be rectified. Everybody is going to have to pay into that."

"This is a living document. Fees are going to change. If we find that the cost of asphalt comes down, the fees come down."

Holloway said it is time to move forward. "We did the best we can do, and we need to get started with something on this program."

[Close Window](#)