



Developer fees remain a hot topic

Cities, county unsure whether to raise cost for hopeful builders

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Western Nevada County's government leaders face a quandary.

Dramatically raising some fees on developers - as recommended by the county's transportation commission last week - could improve traffic flow. But the move would push up the cost of housing and goods, already out of reach for many western county residents.

"I'm not excited about doubling the fees. I need to look at the justification," County Supervisor Sue Horne said.

Last week, the Nevada County Transportation Commission recommended raising the fees per "vehicle trip" generated by new development from \$630 to \$1,350 in the Grass Valley/Nevada City area. A vehicle trip is a one-way drive, equivalent to a trip to the grocery store.

Recommended increases in outlying areas are less. The cost of a trip created in Penn Valley would jump from \$136 to \$290, and south county fees would climb from \$98 to \$209.

But neither the county nor the two western cities - who must approve the fees - have yet discussed the increase, although they plan to in the next month, leaders said this week.

"I'm sure any time you raise fees that high, it kind of raises eyebrows," Grass Valley Mayor Gerard Tassone said. "You just have to look at the justification for it."

The details are critical, Grass Valley City Councilman Dean Williams agreed.

"I'd have to see how (the commission) came up with (the new fees)."

Tassone said he expects the council will be discussing the proposed change soon.

Nevada City also plans to delve into the details behind the numbers soon, Mayor Conley Weaver said.

Weaver said he didn't want to comment on the fees before they are discussed by the council.

City Councilman Kerry Arnett said he hasn't had a chance to study the proposed fees, but that he's supported development fee increases in the past.

The Board of Supervisors have also not considered the development fees yet. The county would be responsible for collecting the fees in areas outside the city.

Nevada County Supervisor Robin Sutherland, also a member of the transportation commission, said she is

reluctantly supportive of the increases.

"We have to be responsible," she said, stressing that area roads desperately need improvement.

Andy Cassano, a planner who guides developers through the permitting process, said he believes most builders are interested in resolving traffic issues. They would rather spend money on actual fixes, rather than endless studies, however, Cassano said.

For County Supervisor Ted Owens, the key is ensuring that fees are equally distributed between residential and commercial development.

Owens said the joint meeting with the supervisors and the councils of Nevada City, Grass Valley, and Truckee on Oct. 18 will provide an opportunity to discuss the development fees.

Since the regional fee program was established in 2001, the commission has collected about \$1.4 million. It has spent money planning for the intersection of Idaho-Maryland Road and East Main Street and on widening the intersection of Sutton Way and Brunswick Road.

This year, development money will pay for part of the realignment of the area south of Idaho-Maryland Road on the Golden Center Freeway.

Transportation planners would like to have the additional money as soon as possible, of course, the commission's Executive Director Dan Landon said Wednesday.

But no deadline is set. Grass Valley, Nevada City and Nevada County need to pass the fee increases before new fees are collected.

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