

## City Council votes on school impact fee ordinance

**MONROE** - The City Council is being asked to meet the day after Christmas to vote on school impact fees.

If the school impact fee ordinance passes, the Monroe School District will lose an additional 25 percent of the fees charged to developers.

The ordinance on the table would keep the discount at 25 percent for one more year, effective through Dec. 31, 2014. The discount would go up to 50 percent on Jan. 1, 2015. The year delay is to give the school district time to figure out how to find money somewhere else to accommodate short-term growth, according to the city.

The issue has been waiting on the docket since last year when the City Council decided to table the discussion.

At nearly every meeting where the issue was brought up, several members of the community came to debate the topic, most on the side in favor of leaving the discount alone.

At the Dec. 10 council meeting, the council voted on the first reading of the ordinance. The vote was tied 3-3 with Councilwoman Patsy Cudaback and Councilmen Jim Kamp and Kevin Hanford voting against the ordinance. Councilmen Kurt Goering, Tom Williams and Jason Gamble voted in favor of the ordinance.

At the Dec. 10 meeting, Monroe School District assistant superintendent John Mannix addressed the council.

One of the council's favorite topics is new development, and he framed his argument along those lines.

"Over 200 single family homes are slated for construction in the vicinity of Chain Lake Elementary School, and we know that there will be students showing up there in the near future," Mannix said.

The school district uses a "student generation rate," which allows it to anticipate the number of new students from new housing development. There will be approximately .615 students coming from each single family home, which means that 125 students will come from those 200 homes.

"We'll need about five classrooms to house those 125 students, which will cost \$545,727," Mannix said. "The mitigation fees at the current 25 percent will cover it, but the 50 percent would not. The 50 percent would give us around \$396,000."

"The bottom line is that we will not be able to house those students unless we take monies from some other source," Mannix said.

Williams said a lot of lip service had been given to the school district's point of view and that he made a point of seeking out the builders' point of view.

"It's very difficult to vote against children, but that's not what is on the table right now, that's not what we're discussing tonight," Williams said. "I don't think it's our job as legislators to fully fund the school capital facilities projects."

Cudaback disagrees.

"This is bridge funding, it's not fully funding their needs," Cudaback said. "I don't think the time is right to lower the school impact fees right now."

The council voted again on Dec. 17. This time the vote was 5-2 with Cudaback and Gamble voting against the ordinance. Kamp and Hanford switched their votes in favor of the ordinance.

The final vote will be Dec. 26.

Goering made the motion to double the discount both nights.

"I'm not compelled that this is the terrible thing that it's made out to be," Goering said.

School board member Nancy Truitt Pierce was disappointed with the vote.

"I clearly dropped the ball in explaining it clearly," Truitt Pierce said. "I didn't make it clear that the mitigation fees are one of our only sources of adjustments to short-term growth. When you build houses, kids come to school and we need to be ready for them."