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## Flowery Branch mulls impact fees

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Development impact fees, once all the rage among governments to help pay for infrastructure, haven't made as much noise in a tanked economy.

Many governments, such as Hall County and Gainesville, adopted the fees long ago, when the economy was moving along with new subdivisions and commercial developments.

Flowery Branch City Council is mulling the concept this week as part of a public hearing on its comprehensive plan update.

"The council has not indicated one way or the other whether it is interested in doing that," City Planner James Riker said of impact fees. "They just want to get information on it."

The hearing is set for 6 p.m. Thursday at City Hall, 5517 Main St.

Residents can chime in as well with thoughts on the subject, which will be discussed in tandem with updates to the city's comprehensive plan, a document intended to help the city address long-term goals.

Flowery Branch's comprehensive plan was adopted in 2006. The state requires local governments to update such plans every five years, with Flowery Branch set to complete its update in early 2011, said the city's consultant on the matter, Jerry Weitz, in a memo to city officials.

The Georgia Development Impact Fee Act, enacted into law in 1990, sets rules for local governments that want to charge new development for a portion of the additional capital projects needed to serve it, according to the state Department of Community Affairs' website.

When first seeking a consultant, Flowery Branch wrote in its proposal it was "interested in getting information on preparing a capital improvements element that would include impact fees for police administration space, parks and recreation, and community recreation space," Riker said.

Whether impact fees may serve to discourage development, particularly with the economy stuck in neutral, might be a topic that surfaces Thursday, Riker said.

"Certainly, that is something for the council to decide," he said. "I guess it would depend on how you look at those sorts of things and evaluate what it costs to do business."

Still, the topic is worth the discussion, Riker added.

"We may find ourselves in a situation where we just realize we're not a community that needs to be going down that path anymore," he said.

Weitz said elected officials generally are nervous that "impact fees will scare away developments, which is generally not true in metro Atlanta, in my opinion."

Also, many in office tend to think impact fees "are going to pay for everything that they ever needed, and that's very rarely true," Weitz said. "It's very unlikely that they are going to pay 100 percent of the cost of new facilities and so forth."

As part of the comprehensive planning process, the city also is updating transportation plans and population, employment and housing estimates, as well as re-evaluating the city's future land-use map.

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