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## Flowery Branch officials: Time not right for impact fees

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Flowery Branch doesn't plan to pursue development impact fees, for now.

City Planner James Riker had brought up the idea, as part of the city's comprehensive plan update, to City Council in August and was directed to gather more information and report back with findings.

"I'm not sure if we adopt impact fees at this time how much money we would generally generate," he told the council Thursday.

He cited a couple of statistics, including that the number of residential building permits dropped to 33 in 2009 from 128 in 2007.

"If we can see an end of the tunnel that we're in relating to economic development, then maybe (impact fees) is something we need to start thinking about," Riker said. "But with the folks that I've talked to, I just don't think that we're quite there yet."

Council members agreed, but the discussion continued with Riker on Flowery Branch's involvement in collecting impact fees for Hall County and how much of the fees have been invested in the Flowery Branch area.

Hall County has collected some \$8.6 million overall since the fees began in April 2003, spokeswoman Nikki Young said.

About \$400,000 has been spent at Alberta Banks Park at 5575 Jim Crow Road.

"And considerably more than the \$277,716 collected so far in the Flowery Branch portion of the Library Fund was used on the Spout Springs Branch library," Young said.

Impact fees were a popular tool used by governments in good economic times to help pay for the consequences of growth, such as busier roads.

Before the economy tanked, Flowery Branch was drawing scores of residents and businesses.

In examining potential impact fees, a city consultant, Jerry Weitz of Gainesville-based Weitz & Associates, issued a recent report suggesting the city should only consider fees associated with public safety facilities.

"The consultant further indicates that trying to fund multiple facilities, such as community centers and multiuse trails, along with police facilities would result in limited

revenues," Riker said in a report to council.

Impact fees weren't dismissed or warmly received at the August meeting.

When city officials noted that neither Buford nor Oakwood have impact fees, Councilman Chris Fetterman said, "If we have impact fees, that could make developers decide they want to go there and build."

Flowery Branch will continue with efforts to update the comprehensive plan, which was last 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.

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