



CITY STILL SEEKING CITIZEN CPA TO SERVE ON THE VOLUNTEER BOARD

Kalispell Considers Role of Impact Fee Committee

By Dan Testa, 8-14-10

During the 2009 Kalispell mayoral race the question of revoking or revising impact fees, and whether these fees were hindering the city's economic development, was one of the key issues. But since then, with development at a virtual standstill, impact fees – and particularly the controversial transportation impact fees – have been on the backburner.

But at a joint work session between the city council and the Impact Fee Advisory Committee last week, members of both groups sought to communicate with each other about mutual expectations, so that when the economy eventually does pick up, Kalispell is in a better position to examine its impact fee policy.

With only four council members present, it was difficult to discern what a majority of the council wants from the impact fee committee, but the key question concerned whether the role of the committee is to provide recommendations on certain issues, or to simply study the current impact fee policy to ensure it complies with state law – or both.

“A lot of times we don't know what to do with something, so we send it back to you. Well, if we don't know what to do with it, how can we expect you to?” Councilman Duane Larson told the impact fee committee. “I think there's a very fine line between policy and advice, but you can certainly cross that line by making a recommendation.”

The impact fee committee, however, seemed split on whether they were comfortable making such recommendations, or if that crossed a line into policy-making, which should be the role of elected council members. Some committee members expressed concerns that taking on an advisory role could make them liable should the city be sued over impact fees.

“I would still be careful about muddying this committee with policy,” Karlene Osorio-Khor said. “I'm not sure that this committee can do both roles that well.”

Other impact fee committee members, like Chad Graham, said he had previously “encountered resistance” when trying to bring up policy recommendations at meetings.

“All we do is we may have a piece of advice,” Graham said. “I really am looking for direction from city council based on the advisory component of this committee.”

Much of the discussion stemmed from the long debate over transportation impact fees, when the city council sent the policy back to the impact fee committee several times over months of deliberation – to the clear frustration of some of the impact fee committee members at the time.

Impact fees are a one-time charge to new developments for the added demand those new additions will place on city services like police and fire protection, and water and sewer systems. Transportation impact fees, adopted in March of 2009, charge developers for road improvements necessitated by new traffic their projects generate. They tend to be more expensive, fall more heavily on commercial developments and continue to generate opposition from the business community.

Two vacancies currently exist on the impact fee committee, one for a regular member and one for a CPA, a role which Rick Wills, the city's assistant finance director, has been filling until a citizen replacement can be found. Three applicants – Jim Cossitt, Roxanna Brothers and Terry Kramer – have submitted letters asking to fill the vacancy but so far, the council has yet to vote on a new member.

“You already have three names right now that have been sitting for almost three months,” Osorio-Khor said. “That's what's frustrating and perplexing to me.”



Caption: Construction workers shingle the roof of the Flathead Bank drive-through at Hutton Ranch Plaza in October of 2007. - File photo by Lido Vizzutti/Flathead Beacon

In a later interview, Mayor Tammi Fisher, who was not present at the work session, said she believed the impact fee committee could handle both studying the fee policy and providing an advisory role to council. She added that she has been asking for volunteers to serve on the committee, for both the CPA and regular vacancy, at nearly every public speaking opportunity she has had, and expected the council to make a decision on a new member soon.

The work session came on the heels of an Aug. 2 meeting where council members voted to slightly adjust fire and police impact fees. The council voted to decrease the police fees for a single-family unit by \$3 to \$41, decrease the apartment unit fee \$4 to \$31 and increase the commercial fee from \$13 to \$16, per 1,000 square feet. The fire impact fees for a single-family unit will decrease \$64 to \$483, an apartment per unit will decrease from \$433 to \$367 and commercial will increase from \$246 to \$350. In the cases of both police and fire, the council agreed to increase the commercial fee less than what was recommended by staff. **[End of article]**

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