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New homeowners may get \$2,000 fee rebate

By Winslow Durgin, Special to the Sun Journal

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MINOT — Owners of houses built within the past seven years could be receiving \$2,000 checks in the mail in the next few months following the Board of Selectmen's vote Monday amending the town's development impact fee schedule.

“This will affect the owners of 106 properties, but the first thing we have to do is establish the owner of record. Whoever owns the property today is the person who gets the refund,” Town Administrator Arlan Saunders said.

Saunders said that since the town's development impact fee ordinance was established in 2003, the town has collected \$2,800 from each person seeking a permit to build a house in Minot.

The purpose for establishing an impact fee, Saunders said, was to offset expenses for needed expansions to public facilities brought on by a growing population.

The money has been set aside with \$2,000 from each permit earmarked to pay for any future expansions to the Minot Consolidated School, \$500 for expanded public safety facilities and \$300 for expanded recreation facilities.

The ordinance also stipulates that if the need for future facilities expansions fails to materialize within a specific time, the money must be refunded.

The selectmen's vote followed recommendations made by Policy One Research Inc., a Scarborough firm which advises towns on development impact fee issues. The recommendation is to reduce the amount collected for school expansions to zero. This will reduce the impact fee charged to people building a home in Minot from \$2,800 to \$800.

The refund is being made because, according to Saunders, school officials have gone on record saying that there are no short-term or long-term plans for any expansion at the Minot school.

“Actually, any expenditure of the impact fees has to be tied to growth in the town and while Minot's population has grown substantially overall, the actual number of kids in the school has gone down,” Saunders said.

Saunders added that the money can't be spent for what are just maintenance issues.

Saunders said that selectmen will discuss the mechanism for refunding that \$2,000 at a future meeting and that it could be a period of time before anyone receives a refund.

“I'll be beginning the verification process to make sure the money goes to the right person. In some instances the fee was paid by the contractor and then some properties have changed hands. We are going to have to make sure that whoever owns the property today is the person who gets the refund,” Saunders said.

The town has collected, and is holding in escrow, about \$296,800. Of that, \$212,000 will be heading back to property owners.

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