



What's Inside This Week's Paper

- [Login](#)
- [Subscribe to Digital Edition](#)
- \$32 Annual Fee**
- [About Digital Edition](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Myvote](#)
- [Classifieds & Legals](#)
- [Gunnison Jobs](#)
- [Gunnison Real Estate](#)
- [Submit a Classified Ad](#)
- [Submit a Letter to the Editor](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertising Rate Card](#)
- [Subscribe to Paper Edition](#)
- [Gunnison Country Magazine](#)
- [Senior Semester](#)

[GCT File Uploader](#)

Community Calendars

- Choose one -

Area Links

- Choose one -

Special Publications



- [GC Magazine 2010](#)
- [Homes Spring 2011](#)
- [Hunting Guide 2010](#)
- [View all Special Publications](#)

[Email an ad rep today!](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Address:
218 N. Wisconsin
Gunnison, CO
81230
[View Map](#)

No linkage fee relief in sight

Times Staff Writer

Originally published 2011-05-12

For a group of contractors and one County Commissioner, it seemed like a reasonable proposal: To take a temporary time-out from Gunnison County's workforce linkage fee to help spur building activity.

But Gunnison County's two Democratic Commissioners, who enacted the controversial affordable housing impact fee in 2006, sided with another, larger group of citizens in attendance at Tuesday's work session. They favored leaving the program in tact.

Commissioners Hap Channell and Paula Swenson cited a rebound of building permits last year and no measurable correlation between the linkage fee and a building downturn in recent years among their reasons for not agreeing to take a time-out on the fee.

The county's workforce linkage fee was implemented to help create a pool of funding for affordable housing projects. The fee — assessed on residential and commercial structures alike — is based on the square footage of a new building and has to be paid when a building permit is pulled.

For example, a 2,500-square-foot home in Gunnison County would be assessed a linkage fee of \$1,988, but the fee nearly doubles for a home of 3,000 square feet.

The fee is intended to address an affordability "gap" between what the local workforce can afford, and what homes actually cost. When enacted in 2006, that gap was growing.

The commissioners have considered a few different changes to the linkage fee in recent weeks, but Republican Commissioner Phil Chamberland — who's long been critical of the regulation — requested that the commissioners consider a temporary moratorium.

"Right now with the building community as slow as it is, any help that we could provide would be beneficial to the economy and to jobs," he said. "Some of these homes employ many people for up to two years. We're losing a lot of laborers who can not make a living here."

Chamberland argued that the moratorium could help pursued potential home builders who might be on the fence about pulling a permit. He argued that as home prices have declined, in turn the affordability gap has dwindled.

Chamberland was backed by a handful of local contractors who addressed the County Commissioners Tuesday.

But Swenson countered that there were actually more building permits pulled — and higher revenues from the fees — in the unincorporated county last year than in 2009.

"From looking at the numbers out there, there is no rationale or connection that I can make between who's pulling building permits, where they're being pulled, and that the linkage fee is a cause for people not to pull building permits," she said.

There were 173 total building permits issued by the county in 2010, compared to 141 in 2009. Of last year's tally, 66 were for new, single family

Phone:
970-641-1414

Fax:
970-641-6515

Email Us:

residences, compared to 46 in 2009.

The county issued more than 200 building permits annually in 2004, 2005 and 2006 — about half of which were for new home construction. But the figures have slid steadily since, before the slight rebound last year.

It's for that reason that local builder Joe Puchek urged the commissioners to look past just last year's higher tally.

Publisher
Co-Owner
Stephen J. Pierotti
publisher@gunnisontimes.com

"When these loans are so close and the banks are so tight, anything you can shave to make this work makes it more feasible for people to come in and do this," said Puchek, who in 2008 was among a group of local contractors that sued the county over the fee, claiming it was an illegal "tax." District Court Judge J. Steven Patrick sided with the county, and ultimately dismissed the case.

Managing Editor
Co-Owner
Chris Dickey
editor@gunnisontimes.com

But Crested Butte builder Ted Colvin concurred with Puchek Tuesday.

"The more it costs somebody to buy something the less inclined they are to buy it," he said. "We don't have a product here that's so sexy that people are really proud they paid more for it."

Staff Writers
Will Shoemaker
will@gunnisontimes.com

Matt Smith
mattsmith@gunnisontimes.com

A contingent of former and current up-valley officials, however, cautioned against drying up the fee.

Gunnison County Planning Commissioner David Owen, of Crested Butte, argued that with the housing market showing signs of recovery, now is not the time to eliminate a "critical" funding source. He said that spending linkage fee revenues in the north end of the valley could also help stimulate the economy.

Advertising Account Manager
Leia Morrison
leia@gunnisontimes.com

On the other hand, former Crested Butte Town Councilor Margot Levy questioned the wisdom of stimulating the building industry when there is reported to be a glut of homes currently on the market.

Production Manager
Jennie Wren
adbuilder@gunnisontimes.com

"What's the nexus for believing that a moratorium on the fee would stimulate anything?" she further posed.

"This fee in most cases is less than 1 percent of the cost of building a house and for the largest houses it generally works out to be less than 2 percent," said former County Commissioner Jim Starr, who in 2006 voted to enact the fee.

Classifieds / Legals
Larry Jensen
classifieds@gunnisontimes.com
legals@gunnisontimes.com

Officials from the Town of Crested Butte's departments of Building and Community Development were present for Tuesday's meeting as well.

Hardcopy Subscriptions
subscribe@gunnisontimes.com

Planning and Community Development Director John Hess suggested linkage fee revenues could be a good use for the town's need of affordable rental stock.

copyright 2011
Gunnison Country Publications, LLC

"I think a discussion about a moratorium on this fee is by definition a discussion on the merits of the program," said Phillip Supino, building assistant for the Town of Crested Butte. "I think putting a moratorium on the fee would have a significant impact on the community (affordable housing) effort that we're trying to do as a county."

Swenson agreed that affordable housing programs, and the demand for them, are growing.

"We're continuing to have these expenses and this was a revenue stream that was linked to a cause for the need for housing," she said.

County records indicate that the linkage fee fund has continued to grow steadily since the program's inception. The balance in the fund is currently \$422,384.

The only major expenditures — aside from regular payments toward the development of affordable housing property the county owns in Gunnison — has been the purchase of four housing units out of foreclosure. Three of them have been in the self-help-build Rock Creek Subdivision in Gunnison (one of which was resold in 2007) and one of the properties is in Stallion Park, the affordable housing component of Buckhorn Ranch near Crested Butte.

Of the three units the county still owns, two are being rented to qualified applicants, and the third is currently being prepared for rental.

For Commissioner Channell, the question of a possible linkage fee moratorium came down to "cause and effect," he said.

"Is (the linkage fee) really the cause of the effect we're seeing in the slowdown of building and selling homes?" he contemplated. "I think it's a much bigger and more complicated issue."

He suggested, instead, that the commissioners consider ways of smoothing out the "stair-step" nature of the linkage fee — so that, for example, a small increase in square footage doesn't equate to a large jump in the corresponding linkage fee that's due.

(Will Shoemaker can be contacted at 970.641.1414 or will@gunnisontimes.com)



Community Calendar

← **MAY 2011** ⇒

Monday, 16

- Fly Tying Class
- Wilderness EMT Upgrade
- Gentle Yoga with Delaney
- Crested Butte School of Dance

Classes

- Therapeutic Yoga

Tuesday, 17

- Wilderness EMT Upgrade
- Fly Tying Class

Times Web Extras



Advertisements

Ads by Google

[Cailforina Building Codes](#)

Intl., Natl., Uniform, City and Cailforina codes at 10% off every d
www.buildersbook.com

[Full Service Handyman](#)

Home & Bathroom Repair and Remodel. Greater Austin (512) 733-2474
www.HandymanMatters.co...

[Senior Housing Locator](#)

Free assistance finding Senior Housing in your local area.
www.aplaceformom.com

[Crested Butte Home Away](#)

Ski Area, Sleeps 7, Friendly Owners Last Minute Specials!
www.cbretreat.com

[Crested Butte Rentals](#)

Luxury townhomes for rent/sale! Perfect for large families & groups
www.crestedbutterental.com