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EVENTS CALENDAR

June 2006						
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25	26	27	28	29	30	

Market Watch

NYSE Jun-22-2006 3:12 pm ET

Index Last Trade Change

NASDAQ	2120.71	-20.49	▼
SP 500	1244.61	-7.59	▼
Russ 2000	685.95	-4.72	▼
AMEX	1880.02	-5.79	▼
NYSE	7921.79	-31.67	▼
30 YR BOND	62.32	0.38	▲

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News

Thursday, June 22, 2006

Parish Council one vote short for passage of controversial impact fee pan

By Aaron E. Looney *The Ascension Citizen*

Published: Wednesday, June 21, 2006 5:33 PM CDT

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Roy Domangue, president of the Capital Region Builders Association, speaks Thursday night during a public hearing at the Courthouse East Annex in Gonzales to discuss proposed traffic impact fees. Domangue gave a PowerPoint presentation on problems CRBA felt existed with the proposed plan. The council later voted 7-4 in favor of the measure, but a super majority of eight votes was needed for the fees to be enacted. *Staff Photo by Aaron E. Looney*

Parish Council worked late into the night Thursday to determine if it wanted to enact proposed traffic impact fees to help fund possible road construction and renovation.

When the clock struck midnight in the council's chamber at the Courthouse East Annex in Gonzales Friday morning, council members who supported the idea found themselves one vote short, as the measure failed, 7-4.

The vote culminated nearly two years of planning and discussion on the matter, including 13 drafts of the impact fee plan.

ONLINE POLL

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The top youth riders from the Louisiana High School Rodeo compete for top honors in the state finals.
www.rodeosportsnetwork.com

Dates: June 15-25, 2006
Times: 7:00 pm
Location: Arena B & Arena D
Admission: Sunday-Thurs. \$6; Friday \$7; Saturday \$8

JULY

Event: 2006 Deep South Crane & Rigging Swamp Pop Music Festival benefiting Cystic Fibrosis
Swamp Pop Music Fest to benefit Cystic Fibrosis
www.swampopmusicfest.com

Dates: July 14-15, 2006
Times: Friday, July 14, 2006
Gates Open @ 5:00 pm
Saturday, July 15, 2006
Gates Open @ 10:00 am
Location: Trade Mart Building
Admission: Adults: Weekend Pass \$15, Friday \$10, Saturday \$7, Children Under 10 FREE!

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- U
- S
- E
- O
- A

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Voting for the measure were Council Chair Jerry Savoy and Councilmen Alvin "Coach" Thomas Jr., Kent Schexnaydre, Adrian Thompson, Dempsey Lambert, Doug Hillensbeck and Martin McConnell. Councilwoman Cheryl Fontenot, Councilmen George Valentine, Todd Lambert and Jared "Burger" Beiriger each voted against the plan.



A super majority - eight of the 11 council members - was needed to pass the proposal.

The meeting, which lasted just over five hours, saw more than half of that time dedicated to hashing out issues with the fee plan, which had already gone through 12 revisions before Thursday. Council members questioned the creators of the impact fee plan on possible revisions, with some making detailed presentations to support their views on the idea.

Fontenot and Valentine have both said previously that they would support enacting an impact fee ordinance if it were brought to the parish voters.

Todd Lambert said that he opposes the plan as written because it does not help parish roads and focuses mainly on state highways.

The vote leaves parish officials with only one of two plans to alleviate traffic congestion - a proposed 20-year, half-cent sales tax.

Traffic impact fees would have been one-time charges placed on new residential, commercial, industrial and educational developments to help with the anticipated additional stress those developments would place on the parish's roads. The fees would have varied, depending on the structure.

Some council members were not clear as to when the fees would be assessed, with the decision coming to assess the fees at the time the building permit is pulled.

The fees would not be assessed in the parish's three municipalities - Gonzales, Donaldsonville and Sorrento.

During a public hearing on the matter, parish citizens as well as representatives from the Capital Region Builders' Association (CRBA) spoke in opposition to the plan,

Billy Ward, president-elect of the CRBA, told the council that introducing traffic impact fees would make it harder for younger, lower-income homebuyers to purchase homes in Ascension Parish.

"People stand up and they fight for housing of spotted owls," Ward said. "They stand up and fight for housing of sea turtles. Now, it's time we stand up and fight for affordable housing for our working young people."

Ward compared affordable housing to animals on the endangered species list, warning that if it is hindered, "it will become extinct."

Parish political activist Kathryn Goppelt offered that an August 2005 opinion on a similar case in West Baton Rouge Parish, State Attorney General Charles Foti said he considered such a fee a tax. She contended that this means the issue should go on the ballot for parishwide vote.

Current CRBA President Roy Domangue presented a PowerPoint slide show which laid out his organization's concerns with the impact fee plan. These include the increase in equipment cost following Hurricane Katrina, fees on large-scale industrial and commercial projects possibly scaring those companies away from Ascension Parish and the concern that the parish would be assessing fees not only on new residents, but existing residents building away from home.

"Statistics show that 55 to 60 percent of new homes permitted are done by people who are already in the parish moving into a nicer new home," said Domangue, who also pointed out that impact fee revenue cannot be used to physically fix the roads.

"The fee seems to be discriminating," Domangue said, citing the difference in cost for the varied developments and a proposed discount for family partitions. "Again, we ask the question - where is the needs assessment required to levy the impact fee?"

Domangue also cited Attorney General opinions that West Baton Rouge Parish and the cities of Baker and Bastrop do not have the authority to impose impact fees.

Some suggestions Domangue made were to ensure accurate assessment of property values, actively promote buying in Ascension Parish to increase sales tax revenue and even reducing the drainage tax from a half-cent to a quarter-cent, taking the quarter-cent to address road improvements.

The study on impact fee feasibility in Ascension Parish conducted by Duncan and Associates also suggests that impact fees could be assessed for other entities in the future if passed today, Domangue said. He also said he felt giving the Parish Council the power to adjust the fees each year was dangerous.

"This sounds like taxation without representation," Domangue said.

Following the meeting, Domangue said that he is willing to work with the parish on finding the best possible solution to traffic issues. He suggested the parish look into community block developments as a possible solution. Using that system, assessing a fee for the five-mile radius around a new development would allow the parish to collect fees over a three-year period.

Current Assistant Superintendent of Ascension Parish Schools Donald Songy spoke in favor of the fees, stating that he felt something needed to be done to correct traffic problems in the parish. Songy said that "complaining will not solve the problem" and that he felt there was "no way to solve the problem without spending a lot of money."

After closing the public hearing, members of the council presented their views on the matter and why they chose to either back the idea or oppose it.

Fontenot showed a PowerPoint presentation which laid out her grounds for contention. She said she would rather see a property transfer fee be implemented because it would generate the necessary dollars quicker than an impact fee and was more reliable.

Schexnaydre contended "people who create the impact should pat for the impact," citing the uproar the council has seen in the past two years of people calling for a moratorium on new construction to help alleviate some of the stress on the parish's infrastructure.

Schexnaydre later made a plea to the council to call a special meeting two weeks from Thursday to vote on the matter, saying that he felt that the revisions to the plan deserved more time for review. However, the motion died from lack of second, as council members said they would rather vote on the plan that night instead of delaying the matter any further.

Todd Lambert said he felt that parish roads need to be taken care of first.

"I haven't had a call yet (asking him) to vote for this," he said.

Parish President Ronnie Hughes said that while he was concerned about affordable housing in Ascension Parish, he is "more concerned about the deaths on our roads."

"If we do nothing, we are hurting Ascension Parish more," the parish president said. "It's not getting any easier. The problems will only intensify."

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