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Paying for growth

New residents will have lower fire impact fees

THE VILLAGES - New residents buying homes in this sprawling retirement community will pay about \$150 less in a fire impact fee than home buyers elsewhere in Sumter County.

That's because there are many more homes planned in The Villages, thus more homes means lower impact fees per residential unit.

Sumter County Commissioner Jim Roberts said the fee passed at Tuesday night's meeting is based on the projections and the money needed due to growth to pay for fire stations, trucks and other equipment.

"We project we will need two fire stations in the next five to seven years," said Fire Chief Mike Tucker of The Villages Fire Department. Tucker said the new additions give The Villages seven stations.

The money that's needed is divided by the anticipated homes.

"When you are talking 26,000 new homes in The Villages, you will have more people to share their cost," Roberts said. "There may not be 26,000 homes built in the rest of the county combined in the next 15 or 20 years."

The new fire impact fee is \$243 in District 1, which includes The Villages, and \$397 in the rest of the county. The fee is a one-time charge to new home buyers.

The fee is different from annual fire assessments levied to homeowners.

Roberts said the county can't collect money in one district and spend it in another. Thus, money collected in impact fees must serve that district.

"You can't use money collected in The Villages and spend it in the south end of the county," he said. "There has to be a nexus."

To illustrate that point, new home buyers in The Villages community, which is now in portions of three counties, pay about \$1,200 more in impact fees

because of required road improvements associated with growth.

A home buyer in The Villages pays a \$2,582 road impact fee, new buyers in unincorporated areas outside the district pay \$1,409, and buyers in cities pay \$897.

"The impact fee is directly related to the road projects," said Robbie Rogers, the director of Sumter County's planning and development. Each district must pay for its projects.

"A new person moving to The Villages still pays much more in impact fees than a person moving outside of District 1," Roberts said of the road and fire impact fees.

In fact, a new Villages home buyer would pay \$1,000 more in impact fees than someone buying outside The Villages.

Commission Chairman Joey Chandler said he believes the impact fee applied to new commercial buildings, which ranges from 50 cents to \$1.50 per square foot, is unreasonable.

"We already put enough fees on new commercial growth," he said. "The businesses are coming because of the growth and to serve the community, and I think the fire impact fee on them is too much."

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