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Polk Looks At Impact Fees For EMS And Parks

By DAWN WADE, Staff Writer

Building in Polk may become a little more expensive.

Commissioners voted on Wednesday to hold a public hearing May 4 on raising the impact fee for county medical services and instituting a new impact fee for parks.

Impact fees are imposed on new construction to pay for the cost of infrastructure to support growth. Something Polk commissioners have long supported.

Only Commissioner Randy Wilkinson stood in opposition to holding the public hearing, stating that he thought that the proposed fees were too high, and also questioning whether churches and public and private schools should pay fees.

Polk already charges impact fees for roads and public safety services, among other fees, but after a presentation by Randy Young of Henderson, Young and Co., most commissioners seemed in favor of raising the EMS fee and instituting the new parks fee.

Currently, the impact fee for EMS is \$49 for residential homes in Polk; the new fee would almost double that price to \$97.

Young told the commission that after 15 years of not being updated, the current fee was not in line with the rising costs of equipment.

"It's like a penalty on government, as they fall behind and costs go up," he said.

The fee is derived from the annual cost of ambulances and EMS stations (\$48,439), divided by the number of responses (2,299), equaling a cost of \$21.07 per call.

Young said that based on the number of houses in the county, each house's expense for EMS services totals \$3.52 per year. When that number is multiplied by the life expectancy of a house (27 years as prescribed by Internal Revenue Service guidelines) the fee becomes \$97, rounded up.

The increase would increase the county revenue from a fiscal year 2003-04 total of \$448,140 to an estimated \$887,317 next year.

Currently, the county charges no fees for parks, but several others do, including Dade County, which topped the list for park impact fees at \$1,453.

To reach a recommendation, Young and his staff took the regional value of the park lands (\$82.6 million) and divided it by the county population (498,769) to arrive at a regional value per capita value of \$166. The regional value refers to parks used by many people, such as parks with sports fields.

Inside this section:

[New, Larger Ambulances Equipped To Care for the Smallest of Patients](#)

[Polk Looks At Impact Fees For EMS And Parks](#)

[Australian Group Study Exchange Team Visits Bartow Rotary Club](#)

[Polk High School Panelists Give Educators High Marks](#)

[Old Marine and City Clerk Are Honored](#)

[Cochran May Face Police in Future City Confrontations](#)

[FM Woman Wins National Migrant Award](#)

[Four New Appointees Advance](#)

[Lower Bond Is Proposed For Subdivision Developers](#)

[Main Street Work To Begin This Week](#)

[SR 60 To Be Closed April 22](#)

[Polk County Support Groups](#)

Business

[Groundbreaking Set For Holiday Inn Express](#)

Community

[Adkison, Churchwell Family Reunion](#)

[Military News](#)

The area value (\$60.8 million) was then divided by the population of unincorporated Polk (308,592), to total \$197. Area parks were defined as smaller, neighborhood parks.

These totals were then added together and multiplied by the average number of people living in each household in Polk (2.47) to arrive at \$897.

Young suggested this number be reduced by \$443, as the county has historically found money, up to \$900,000 in some years, to devote to parks each year.

He told the county that with an annual building permit number of 3,500, Polk could see \$1.5 million for parks with this new fee.

In an effort to ward off confusion, Young said he would recommend the county keep its current policy regarding manufactured and mobile homes. This policy treats manufactured and mobile homes in single family residential areas - those not in mobile home parks, for example - as single family homes.

This policy, he said, would prevent the confusion a blended rate would cause. A blended rate, made up from the mobile home and residential rate, would also lower the overall fees for residential homes, costing the county some money it could collect from the new fee.

Commissioners are expected to discuss the plan in more detail on the day of the public hearing.