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Reasons given for 'impact fee'

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 By **TED LaBORDE**
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SOUTHWICK - Department of Public Works officials will launch an effort to establish impact fees on all new construction in town.

DPW Director Jeffrey A. Neece and town engineer Richard T. Grannells will meet with the Planning Board tonight at 7 p.m. to present the plan for consideration by that agency. If successful, the plan will then be transferred to the Board of Selectmen and eventually to a Town Meeting for formal adoption.

An impact fee, Grannells said yesterday, is an assessment "up front" upon approval of new building in town to help offset the impact on town services such as schools, police and fire. Such fees will provide a pool of funding to help deal with that impact, he said.

"This drive was actually started about 10 years ago here and impact fees do exist in other communities in Massachusetts," Grannells said.

The assessment on new construction will be determined by location, he said, and a new Capital Infrastructure Fund will be established to hold fees until needed by various town agencies to improve services. The amount of the impact fee will be determined during the adoption process, officials said.

Grannells used an example of new construction, specifically single-family homes, in either the extreme northwestern or southwestern sections of Southwick. "There would be no impact on water or sewer services because those do not currently exist there. But there would be a definite impact on our schools, police and fire services. The impact fee will help meet that impact and better serve the town," he said.

Southwick has a full-time Police Department but its Fire Department is volunteer. Also, the Southwick-Tolland Regional School District is in need of repairs and renovations to each of its three schools. Currently there is a classroom space issue at Woodland Elementary School and the School Department lacks necessary funds to improve the situation.

Last year alone, Southwick issued 72 building permits and the number of permits for about the past 10 years has averaged at least 60 to 65, Grannells said.

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