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Local News: Boone County

Boone again eyes higher home fees

By Rob Baxter, REGISTER STAR BOONE COUNTY BUREAU

BELVIDERE — Boone County is considering raising fees it charges developers by about 25 percent to offset the cost of rapid growth.

If adopted, the change would push impact fees to more than \$5,250 for every new four-bedroom home built in Boone County. Fees were last increased in 2004, and the county hopes to decide whether to increase the fee within the next two months.

Boone County is not alone in proposing fee increases to help pay for schools and other services.

Belvidere will raise one portion of its fees starting in May. Poplar Grove Mayor Roger Day said his village will look at what the county does as it considers changes later this year.

County Administrator Ken Terrinoni said the county looks at impact fees every two years, taking into account such things as the fair market value of the land, which is skyrocketing in Boone County.

Less than two years ago, the average price for an acre was \$58,082, according to the county's figures. The average sale price is now \$70,491.

Dennis Sweeney of the Home Builders Association of Rockford criticized the proposal.

"Unless people's wages go up comparably, fewer people can afford to buy new homes," Sweeney said.

Sweeney points to dozens of Illinois counties in which populations are shrinking and where the economy and schools often suffer.

"Growth is not a problem, it's a benefit," he said.

For people like Belvidere finance manager Dick Stegemann, more people mean a bigger burden on resources.

Belvidere has an additional fee for police, fire, public works and administration. Those fees will increase to \$1,532.49 per home starting in May. Combine that with traditional impact-fee money that goes to schools, the park and conservation districts, and the public library, and home fees charged to developers will run as high as \$9,465.33 in Belvidere starting in May, Stegemann said.

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“It helps us to buy something, say for example, a new squad car,” Stegemann said. “Or we can put it toward things like equipment when we move into our new village hall.”

Poplar Grove has instituted transition fees of thousands of dollars per home in addition to impact fees. Those fees are designed to help North Boone schools, which are bracing for an unprecedented influx of students from thousands of new homes forecast in the district during the next decade.

In 2004, Boone County’s population jumped 14 percent, from 41,786 people in 2000 to 47,611 people. That growth is expected to continue and possibly accelerate.

Debbie Carlson, a Realtor for Coldwell Banker Premier in Belvidere, said impact fees definitely come up in conversations in her business.

“People have always thought Boone County was less expensive, that is why they come here,” Carlson said. “People don’t realize though that now over \$80,000 is being spent (on lots) before you even build a home.

“It’s often harder on the local people to afford than those moving from the Chicago suburbs. We are squeezing the young families, the first-time home buyers, out. They’ll go where it’s more affordable.”

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Where Boone County impact fees go

Boone County collects fees for schools, parks and the Boone County Conservation District.

It proposes that those fees rise by about 25 percent. That would mean a new three-bedroom home built in unincorporated Boone County would be assessed impact fees of \$3,528, an increase from \$2,893.

Schools and parks get a lion’s share of the money. For example, on a three-bedroom home, \$1,631 would go to schools, \$1,094 to parks and \$168 to the Conservation District.

Source: Boone County Administrator’s office

How the fees compare

Counties and communities across the Rock River Valley use land values, amount of land to be developed and number of people per home to determine impact fee amounts. Here is a sampling:

- **Boone County (unincorporated land):** \$519 to \$4,343
- **Belvidere:** \$2,876 to \$9,465
- **Roscoe:** \$299 to \$3,755
- **Winnebago County (unincorporated land):** \$359 to \$2,965
- **Roscoe:** \$299 to \$3,755
- **Winnebago County (unincorporated land):** \$359 to \$2,965



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