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Colma wants developers to pay for parks

Officials say lack of open space may stifle opportunities

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COLMA — With developers eyeing two lots near the BART station, lawmakers are fast-tracking an ordinance that would require them to pony up for city parks.

On Wednesday, the City Council will vote on an urgency ordinance that would require developers of major new subdivisions to supply parkland and developers of buildings with under 50 units to pay a parks fee. If the council agrees, the law will go into effect without the customary second vote.

“In the event we do get an application, we want developers to know what will be required of them,” City Planner Andrea Ouse said. Nine other cities in the county have parkland dedication fees, she added.

Colma, a town of 1,350 residents, has never offered much in the way of public parks. The town provides residents free cable service as an alternative for not having a more extensive parks and recreation program, City Manager Diane McGrath said.

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Colma recently built a new recreation center, but has only two parks totaling 1.73 acres, one of which is dedicated to dogs, Ouse said. The town has no baseball field and no school playground, but has pledged \$500,000 toward a proposed athletic field complex in Daly City.

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The city’s population has jumped about 30 percent since 2000, placing strains on park space and recreation programs, officials said. State standards suggest a city of Colma’s size should provide 4 acres of park land, according to a city report.

Unfortunately, city officials said, given the limited space for new development or open space, the park fee may not actually yield any new parks.

Ouse said that the city could instead allocate the fees to help pay for a community garden, a trail along Colma Creek or to upgrade recreation programs.

The two potential developments, both located on the 7700 block of El Camino Real, are both about a half-acre — too small to require developers to dedicate land, Ouse said. She added that fees would vary depending on the appraised value of the development and on whether developers provided open-space recreation amenities.

Developers could request a 50 percent fee discount for adding public walkways, picnic areas or play areas. The city estimates that the average cost of supplying land suitable for park purposes in Colma is between \$40,000 and \$55,000 per unit.

