

Sutherlin looks to add fees to buy park land

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September 16, 2005

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SUTHERLIN -- New homes built in Sutherlin next year will likely face an additional system development charge, which would be used to purchase park land.

The concept was discussed at a Sutherlin Parks Advisory Committee meeting Thursday. There, Rick Satre of Satre Associates in Eugene discussed how SDCs work and why they are needed.

"You are land poor with respects to parks and open space," he said. "First we need property, and to get the funds, there are system development charges."

Satre was hired by the city about two years ago to help form a parks master plan, which will serve Sutherlin's growing population. About 7,500 people now live within the city, but that number is expected to swell to 10,000 within the next eight or nine years.

To prepare for the growth, the Sutherlin City Council adopted the parks master plan last June. Now, the parks committee is ready to take action.

The first priority is to obtain property that can be used for neighborhood and community parks. A long list of potential sites has been identified -- such as near Cook Creek and Ford's Pond -- but funds are needed to purchase the property. Satre recommended SDC charges as a funding source to make future purchases possible.

These charges are folded into the building permit process, and they can only be used to buy land and create parks. They cannot be used for maintenance or administrative purposes. Satre added that the same amount would be charged to each home built; differences in the types of dwellings are not taken into account.


"Timing is everything," he said. "It certainly helps to have an ordinance in the books. ... We need to get the community involved and show them it's fair."

Satre said the money would be put into an account within the city's general fund budget. The city council would be required to say how the funds would be spent -- such as through identifying a specific piece of property to purchase.

The challenge, Satre said, is to create a fee that is easy to administer and understand. It must be fair, and he and City Manager Bud Schmidt said it needs to be high enough to cover costs but low enough to keep from detracting prospective builders.

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"We want lower system development charges (than the rest of the Roseburg area,)" Schmidt said. "We need to keep people coming here, putting money in the bank and buying houses."

Satre and the parks committee will now gather data on SDC ordinances in other Oregon cities, which will be used as a template for what Sutherlin will need. The statistics will be reviewed at a meeting on Oct. 13.

Afterward, a timeline will be developed and a plan, detailing the proposed fee, may be presented to the city council as early as next February.

Plans are also in the works to decide the future of the Timber Days Grounds. Representatives with the parks committee will meet with the rodeo and Blackberry Festival committees next week to assess present and future needs.

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