

CRESTVIEW News Bulletin

To fee or not to fee

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City officials say they're caught between making Crestview attractive to developers and businesses and needing impact fees to help pay for the added burden new projects place on city infrastructure.

Putting a moratorium on some of the city's impact fees could encourage growth yet allow time to study the issue, officials said.

Administrative Services Director Mike Wing and Public Works Director Wayne Steele shared their thoughts during a recent city council workshop about Crestview's impact fees. Both men want to see the fees reduced, but both acknowledge the city needs the fees

to maintain city infrastructure.

The fees, in part, fund portions of the city's infrastructure growth, which is based on long-range plans that endeavor to predict how much growth the city can expect and where it will probably occur.

"We have put a lot of thought into this as staff," Wing said. "We seriously want to move forward in repealing a portion of the fair share fees. The state supports us in this."

Wing said he, Steele and city planner Eric Davis evaluated the different fees assessed by the city, and focused on transportation fees. Funding roads is still vital to the city, Wing said, and the long-range transportation plan currently under development is still very important.

"We'd like to propose that the council consider not changing the plan, but to consider establishing a one-year moratorium on the commercial transportation development impact fee," Wing said. "During that year, we would like to recommend that we contract with an engineering firm to reevaluate our impact fees. It is a fluid number. Our impact fees that are currently on our books may change."

The city council was cautiously receptive to the idea, as the topic of impact fees has proved a delicate subject.

"You want to hold a business responsible but you also want to balance it with (the potential for) driving a business away," council member Ben Iannucci said.

"What's worse is, they could locate right outside the city limits and still have an impact but we wouldn't be compensated for it," Wing replied. "Impact fees are still a valuable way, sometimes the only way, to offset the cost of development."

"My concern is you only ask for one year," Council President Charles Baugh Jr. said. "Some of these projects take a long time to develop."

Builders and developers in the audience agreed.

"I like what I hear, but I don't like the one year," said Paul Cassidy, a developer working on a project on Live Oak Church Road. "About the time we get this figured out and the people at Chick-Fil-A or Outback

figures we got it figured out, the one year is over. They may not even know we're available for six months."

Wing said the moratorium could be extended if it looks like it is a success. Steele added it would allow the city to do something to address the problem of high impact fees while buying time for consultants to finish Crestview's transportation planning process.

"We think that this is a great approach to give us and the (consulting) firm the time to finish our long-range traffic plan," Steele said. "Then we can hear the comments from them (about) how we can go about funding these things. There's a lot of answers that will be there when this is finished.

"This gives the builders a chance to come in while we're still working. I don't think anybody has all the answers, but this gives us a little bit of time."

"We need some of the growth we're seeing in our neighboring counties and even in the south of this county, and we need to get some of that business here in Crestview," Baugh said.

"If we appear to be more liberal (with the suspended fee), we could attract some of that business, and we can always revisit it," Wing said. "It is a conservative approach."

The council will consider Wing's team's proposal at an upcoming meeting.

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