

Tulare County may add fees to city projects

Written by

DAVID CASTELLON

dcastell@visalia.gannett.com

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Tulare County officials are preparing to raise the cost of building new homes and businesses, and it won't matter where in the county they're built.

That's because officials not only want to charge development impact fees for new construction in unincorporated parts of the county, but also within cities — which already charge their own impact fees.

Representatives from some Tulare County cities and the construction industry discussed the proposed fees during a workshop Wednesday at the Tulare County Board of Supervisors chambers in Visalia.

If the supervisors approve the fees, that could add thousands of dollars to the cost of building a new home or business here.

County officials said the fees are needed to help the county pay to keep up with projected growth.

The proposals include:

^a A traffic impact fee to help pay for widening and improving roads in the county that would be most heavily traveled as the number of people living and working here grows.

^a A facilities impact fee to help pay for county services that include libraries, law enforcement, fire protection, public health, agriculture services, jails and parks.

Wednesday's workshop focused on discussing the final report commissioned by the county on transportation impact fees.

A second meeting scheduled Friday will focus on the facilities impact fees.

Plans are to hold additional meetings in the coming weeks with representatives from each city.

Visalia's assistant city manager, Mike Olmos, said he would like Resource Management Agency officials to conduct the discussion in a public forum and invite the

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public.

"These people are paying the freight. Our [city] council won't be comfortable until they know these folks are involved," Olmos said.

RMA Director Jake Raper said his agency is open to providing private or public presentations on the fees and would be willing to meet with other groups with stakes in the matter.

County officials want to extend the fees to new developments in the cities because residents and workers don't just stay in the cities. They drive on county roads, visit county parks, have access to emergency assistance from county firefighters and sheriff's deputies, Raper said.

And as the county population grows, those services need to be expanded, he said.

"The philosophy is new growth needs to pay its way," he said.

Gary Mills, a project manager for OMNI-MEANS Ltd., the engineering and planning firm that conducted the traffic impact fee study for the county, said just widening and improving the main arterial roadways most affected by increased traffic through 2030 is expected to cost about \$1.2 billion.

Urban areas with heavier traffic, including Visalia and Tulare, will get the most benefit from the road improvements, so they'll pay higher traffic impact fees, officials said.

As such, the fee for a single-family home in Visalia or Tulare would be \$2,181,

whereas in the Woodlake area — where fewer road improvements would occur — the fee would be only \$816.

There are separate fees for duplexes and apartment buildings, as well as for businesses, which are based on square footage.

The traffic impact fee for a new, 20,000-square-foot office building would total \$18,800 in Woodlake but would cost more than double, \$50,200, in Visalia and Tulare.

On top of that would come the public utilities impact fees.

Those fees are based on a series of smaller fees for libraries, sheriff's protection and other services, Raper said.

"If a city had a police department, we aren't going to charge the sheriff's [service] fee" because residents already are paying taxes for their local law enforcement, Raper said.

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And developments in Tulare and Porterville wouldn't be charged for county library services because those cities have their own libraries.

Developments in cities with their own parks would be charged portions of the facilities impact fees to help support county parks — as city residents often use them — but those fees would be higher in unincorporated parts of the county, where the parks are county-run, Raper said.

As such, the total facilities impact fees for a new, single-family home would total \$4,324 in Visalia, \$3,997 in Tulare, but would just about triple to \$12,692 in Pixley, Cutler, Lemon Cove and other unincorporated towns, according to figures provided by Raper.

And the county impact fees would have to be paid on top of the impact fees charged by the cities, which is more than \$9,600 in Visalia for a single-family home and \$8,370 in Tulare for a single-family home. (That Tulare figure will go up to \$10,286 for a 2,000-square-foot home starting May 15, after the City Council in March approved a hike and new impact fee schedule based on home size.)

If the Board of Supervisors approves the county fees, it could be the nail in the casket for development here, said Bob Keenan, president and chief executive officer of the Home Builders Association of Tulare/Kings Counties Inc.

"We're trying to have affordable development in the county," he said.

And with new construction already in a major slump due to the economy, the county fees could stall things even further, said Baldo Rodriguez, Porterville's public works director.

Keenan also questioned whether the county has the right to have cities collect fees on its behalf.

Keenan said his group is opposed to the fees, but if the county is set on charging them, he hopes that they can be reduced, or the supervisors should hold off on charging them until after the economy and construction industry here improve.

He cited an industry study that for every \$1,000 added to the price of a house, about 133 people, on average, are priced out of that house.

Read the reports

Two studies on Tulare County's proposed development impact fees are available with this story online at www.TulareAdvanceRegister.com. The public is invited to attend a discussion on the

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fees starting at 1:30 p.m. Friday at the county Board of Supervisors chambers at 2800 W. Burrel Ave., Visalia.

To discuss fees with county Resource Management Agency Director Jake Raper or to request a presentation on the fees, call 624-7000.

Related Links

- [Sept 2010 Final TIF Report.pdf](#)
- [Tulare County Public Facilities Fee Report Public Review Draft 4.pdf](#)

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