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Impact fees back on agenda

Council expected to discuss new study

By Mike Cherney

The Sun News

Horry County Council could renew its campaign to create impact fees at its meeting today, but some council members said they are unsure whether they will support the proposal.

The council will also decide whether to pay a consulting company, TischlerBise, about \$100,000 to calculate an appropriate amount for the impact fees. The fees would be charged to developers and would help pay for some public infrastructure.

TischlerBise completed a report for Horry County in 2001, using data from the 2000 census, that called for a \$757 impact fee per home and a \$724 fee for a mobile home. The report also calculated fees for commercial, office and industrial buildings.

Before any impact fees can be approved, state law requires that the county commission a study to calculate the impact fees, said John Weaver, the county attorney.

The 2001 report needs to be updated, and, if it is approved, it should be completed in 120 days, he said.

The impact fees also must be approved by the council before they go into effect. If the council approves the first reading for the impact fees tonight, the council must still pass the proposal two more times.

The county would also have to decide whether to collect the fee when it issues building permits, when construction is completed or when a home is finally sold, Weaver said. The fee would probably be reflected in the final cost of a home.

Money collected from the impact fees could be used to pay for emergency services, fire protection and to build courts, jails, libraries and parks, according to the draft ordinance proposing the impact fees.

Councilman Marion Foxworth said he supported creating an impact fee but had some concerns about the state law that allows local governments to create them.

State law requires that impact fees can only be assessed on a per-unit basis for residential developments, and also limits the way that local governments could spend the money.

"We would be forced to charge the same impact fee to a 10-bedroom, 8-bathroom mansion as we would a 1,000-square-foot bungalow with vinyl siding," he said. "It's not linked to the value of the property."

Councilman Howard Barnard said he was unsure whether impact fees were a good idea at all. But he said they would be a better way to get money for public services and infrastructure than increasing property taxes.

"When the country may be close to a recession, you don't go back to the taxpayers and ask them to raise property taxes," Barnard said. "If taxes are out of the question, and impact fees are out of the question, then the only other option you have is to cut services."

Both Barnard and Foxworth said they would support updating the TischlerBise study.

If you go

What | Horry County Council meeting

When | 6 p.m. today

Where | Horry County Government & Justice Center, 1301 Second Ave., Conway

For information | 915-5000

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