



Higher fees for enlarged homes OK'

Arcadia to funnel more funds to parks, recreation

By Kevin Felt, Staff Writer

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ARCADIA - Homeowners adding a bedroom or otherwise expanding the square footage of their dwellings could end up paying thousands of dollars in city fees, money that will be used to pay for parks and recreational services, City Council members decided last week.

Bigger homes mean more residents, and more residents translates into an increased need for park space and expanded recreational programs, officials said at a meeting.

As a result, City Council members - after a contentious discussion and a split, 3-2 vote Tuesday - approved raising the city's decades-old Park Facilities Impact Fee, which homeowners since 1963 have paid the city whenever they add onto their homes, or build new homes on their properties.

Under the revised formula, homeowners will pay \$2.85 for each square foot added to a single "detached" home and \$3.73 per square foot added to "attached" apartments, town homes

and condominiums.

Instead of paying \$185 for adding 1,000 square feet to a home, homeowners will pay 15 times as much - more than \$2,850. Someone demolishing an existing home and rebuilding a new home will pay only the fee on the additional square footage.

The fee increase was developed through a complicated formula in which officials converted how much per-person it costs the city to provide parks and recreational services into a fee per square foot.

The fees, which go into effect in two months, will be collected when homeowners take out building permits, according to city documents.

But Councilman John Wuo, who voted no with Councilman Peter Amundson, said with the ongoing housing crisis, it's not a good time to raise fees on homeowners.

"I think the timing for this is real bad. Right now, real estate is on the downside," said Wuo, who supported a lower fee of \$1.16 per square foot for detached homes and \$1.52 per square foot for apartments, town homes and condominiums.

"My concern is the cumulative effect on residents," Amundson said, noting homeowners already pay a wide variety of taxes and fees.

"There are going to be so many fees that people who live here won't be able to afford to expand their house."

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Wuo said higher fees could also discourage people from moving to Arcadia, which already has high real estate prices.

"Now we add a few thousand dollars to the price" of a new home, he said.

But a staff report concluded that the current fees were "insufficient to meet current levels of service" and didn't reflect current costs.

Without the increase, Arcadia would be unable to upgrade and improve park facilities to keep up with the rate of development, according to city staff.

"We've got a 45-year-old fee that needs to be adjusted and brought into the 21st century," said Councilman Robert Harbicht.

New homes and expansions of existing homes increase the number of potential residents, he said.

"As the population grows, it essentially reduces the recreational facilities available to all of us," he said.

With the new fees, expanded households "pay their fair share," he said.

"To me it seems like a fair fee," Harbicht said. "It's unfair to the current residents and current property owners here to let new people come in and dilute their recreational opportunities."

The city has compiled a list of about \$11.8 million in recreation-related capital improvements it wants to complete in the future.

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