



Beaufort, Port Royal weigh benefits, costs of impact fees

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Officials from Beaufort and Port Royal will take another look at impact fees this week at their respective council meetings, but the discussion started Monday evening at a joint session of the two councils in Port Royal.

The Beaufort City Council will consider adopting a fire facilities capital improvement plan at its meeting today at 6 p.m. The Port Royal Town Council will hear a presentation Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. about a proposed library impact fee.

Members of both councils said Monday they will be cautious about putting any additional charges on developers who are considering new residential, commercial and mixed-use buildings.

A fire facilities development impact fee would be used to generate revenue for a new fire station and increased fire services, shared jointly by Beaufort and Port Royal. Each municipality would collect fees from new developments within their boundaries.

A library impact fee - imposed by both municipalities - would generate revenue for capital improvements and equipment. The library system serves all of Beaufort County.

"I understand them," Beaufort councilmember Donnie Beer said of impact fees. "But it's kind of like being caught between the devil and the witch. On the one side you're costing developers more money, but then that raises the price of a house."

Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling said he and other city council members support libraries, but don't support charging local taxpayers twice - through the city and county - for a single service.

Other topics at Monday's joint meeting:

- Transfer of Development Rights program** Ginnie Kozak of the Lowcountry Council of Governments gave a presentation about the program. If passed by all local councils, transfer of development rights will be used to protect Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort from encroaching development, she said. Through the program, landowners in certain areas near the air station would agree to reduce the development potential for their property, then sell their development rights to another property owner for use in parts of the county slated for more dense development.

- Small subdivision rural policy** Council members heard a presentation from county long-range planner Rob Merchant about possibly eliminating the "rural residential" zoning designation in favor of a redefined "rural" designation that would allow small-parcel property owners to increase the density on their land. The new zoning policy would become part of the new Northern Regional Plan currently being developed.