

Beaufort Council considers impact fees to support fire, library

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Discussions of proposed library and fire facility impact fees, sidewalk cafes and an eight-year-old utility bill to St. Peter's Catholic Church were the focus of Tuesday's Beaufort City Council meeting.

Bernie Kole, advocacy director for the Friends of the Beaufort County Library, suggested a \$553 impact fee on single-family residences would enable the library to pay for capital improvements, equipment purchases and other items, including books.

Councilman Mike Sutton said, while he supports and often uses Beaufort's library, an impact fee would be an inappropriate way to fund the library because the fee would not be a reliable revenue source, particularly in the current economy.

Councilwoman Donnie Beer said that she was hesitant to add more fees to those building new residences in Beaufort.

City Planning director Libby Anderson presented estimates that the Beaufort Fire Department faces about \$1,700,000 in capital project costs by 2018. The fire fee, as presented and endorsed by Anderson, would add \$1,079 to the cost of new residences within the city.

In other actions, the council approved an ordinance allowing sidewalk cafes within the city. Dining areas will be permitted on sidewalks with a minimum of 10 feet from the property line to the curb. Cafes will be allowed to operate until 1 a.m. and the city will exact a \$300 permit fee from restaurants opening sidewalk cafes.

The council also dealt with a \$15,000 charge for sewer capacity fees that was supposed to be sent to St. Peter's after its property became part of the city in 2000. When the church recently requested the money be reimbursed, officers of the Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority discovered the bill had never been issued.

The issue was complicated by an April 2000 letter to then-church pastor the Rev. Ron Cellini from former Beaufort Mayor Bill Rauch, who appeared to promise the church that the fees would be waived or reimbursed in exchange for the church's approval of inclusion within the city.

"I have discussed this matter with my colleagues on City Council, and can assure you that if the church wishes to join the city, the city will pay these fees up to a maximum \$15,000," the letter says. It continues, "Final approval of this incentive will require a vote by the City Council."

Beer and Councilman Gary Fordham, who was absent from the meeting but addressed the council in a letter, said they had never voted to approve any reimbursement regarding the church fees. City manager Scott Dadson said there was no record of such a vote.

The council voted to address the matter by scheduling a meeting with city, BJWSA and church officials.