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Permit costs may go up

Additional revenue from increase to help pay for services city provides

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The permitting cost of building a new home in Cape Coral will break through the \$1,000 level later this year if the city council adopts recommendations from a just completed study. The proposed increases, if approved, also will help the city recover the costs of the services it provides for the permits. The Community Development, Fire and Public Works departments spend about \$13.2 million a year reviewing plans, inspecting work and providing other services. But the current fee schedule brings in about \$6.2 million, leaving the city to cover about \$7 million of work with other funds.

"The underlying assumption of user fees is that any services benefiting an individual should be paid by the individual," said the report's executive summary.

The study — the first comprehensive look at the fees since 2000 — updates fees that became effective in January 2001. Some fees also are new, reflecting changes in the services city workers provide or to recover costs that weren't covered by a fee before, Mark Mason, financial services director, said Monday.

As an example, the proposal recommends a \$127.50 increase in the permits for a new home valued at \$125,000. Permits for such a home cost \$987.50 today and would increase to \$1,115.

That recommendation, plus the four impact fees collected by the city adds \$8,354.33, to the cost of a new, \$125,000 home. Permit fees are considered user fees. Impact fees are assessed on new construction to help pay for roads parks and other basic services required to meet the demand of growth.

The study is the first step toward introducing a new fee schedule on Oct. 1, Mason said. The next step is to meet with city council members to explain the changes. In May or June an ordinance will be introduced to update the fees.



• Jason Harris of Gulf Breeze Construction works on the roof of a home in northwest Cape Coral on Monday. The city is thinking about raising the costs of permits to build a home. *ANDREW WEST/The News-Press*

INFORMATION

- Current and recommended permit fees for a \$125,000 home in Cape Coral
- Permit - Current fee - Recommended
- Building permit \$687.50 \$775
- Plan review \$55 \$55
- Zoning permit \$44 \$25
- Concurrence review \$15 \$20
- Landscape review \$25 \$20
- Driveway, culvert stakeout \$99 \$110
- Sod, swale, stakeout \$62 \$110
- Total \$987.50 \$1,115

Impact fees

- Roads \$1,499 • Recreation \$1,115
- Fire/Emergency \$316.33 • Utilities \$4,309

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The city also expects to hold meetings with the construction industry to explain the fees, said Carl Schwing, department of community development director.

Overall, the study looks at 230 different fees for residential and nonresidential purposes. The range covers activities such as roofing, site plan review for developments, special event signs, major development plan reviews, fire safety inspections for marina slips, zoning matters, stormwater activities, land use amendments and alley work.

"I would caution the industry against overreacting to it until we know what is in it," Patti Schnell, executive director of the Cape Coral Building Industry Association, said Monday.

Her copy of the study arrived at her office late last Friday.

"I've not even reviewed it or talked to anybody yet," she said.

"Any increase in fees should have a direct relationship to service. That's always the concern," Schnell said.

The permit fees reviewed by the study are for services provided by the Department of Community Development, Fire Department and Public Works Department. None of the departments collects enough fees to pay for the cost of the service it provides.

Some permits are increasing hundreds of dollars. A building permit for a nonresidential building with a value between \$50,000 and \$100,000 would go up \$975. There is a proposed increase of \$1,140 for the public hearing on an application for a development of regional impact.

While increases are recommended for most of the fees, some decreases are suggested. The cost of a seawall inspection would drop \$34. A nonresidential zoning permit site plan review drops \$235.

In some cases, the proposed fee schedule doesn't appear to cover the cost reported for a particular service. Different parts of a department might have a role in that service, Mason said. The full cost of the service in those cases is recovered with the fees collected by each section, he said.

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