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Facilities fee get grace period

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ARCADIA - Developers who plan to build new homes and homeowners who have submitted room-addition plans to the city will have a year to obtain a building permit if they want to avoid paying increased park fees.

The newly hiked Park Facilities Impact fee originally was set to go into effect Friday. But after a developer complained about the deadline, City Council members last week voted to give developers and homeowners with design plans already submitted to City Hall one year to obtain building permits.

If they don't obtain permits by the new deadline - March 14, 2009 - they will have to pay an increased fee.

Council members voted 3-2 in January to update the fee, which homeowners and developers have paid since whenever they add onto their homes, or build new homes on properties.

The update means homeowners could end up paying thousands of dollars more in city fees whenever they take out building permits - with the money going for local parks and recreational services.

More and bigger homes mean more residents, which translates into an increased need for park space and expanded recreational programs, the council decided.

But developer Jeffery Lee of Arcadia-based Nevis Homes, which is building a senior housing complex in the city, complained to the council that officials were "changing the rules" for projects already in the development pipeline.

He asked that the city to allow "certain projects that are far enough along in process" to be exempt from the fee increase.

Mayor Mickey Segal said the city couldn't postpone charging the fee indefinitely, so he proposed extending the deadline 12 months for those projects.

"Our goal is to do something that's fair for those people who are already in the process, but if we extend it long enough, then it's unfair for people who aren't in the process," said Councilman Robert Harbicht.

Development Services Director Jason Krukeberg estimated that the exemption will cost the city more than \$900,000 - revenue that would have been generated had the increase applied to about 75 projects currently in "the pipeline."

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, townhomes and condominiums.

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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.

Instead of paying \$185 per residential unit, developers like Nevis building senior apartments would pay \$3,730 for each 1,000 square feet it builds.

A staff report concluded that the previous 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.

"As the population grows, it essentially reduces the recreational facilities available to all of us," said Councilman Robert Harbicht when the fee passed.

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