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City commissioners plan to revise park impact fees

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LARGO – City commissioners plan to reduce park impact fees, concerned that high fees will discourage development.

Commissioners asked their staff Jan. 12 to prepare an ordinance calling for a reduction in the recommended rate by about 33 percent.

Mayor Pat Gerard said the city has to balance concern of the “wonderful” level of service that the city has against the “concern the developer will go someplace else.”

The issue now, she said, does not include whether the city ever wants more parks.

“The levels of service are based on what we can get away with. Right now, I don’t think we can get away with what we are charging,” Gerard said. “I think we are in a different time than we were 10 or 15 years ago when it was set.”

By consensus, commissioners asked staff to come up with a proposed ordinance that basically calls for a flat rate of about \$1,900 for a standard multi-family unit, down from a proposed rate of \$2,860. Under the current formula, the fee is about \$6,375.

The current formula is based upon the purchase price of the proposed development site, which does not provide for a fixed unit cost. The purchase price among proposed residential developments is likely to vary considerably relative to zoning, city officials have said.

Largo Community Development Director Carol Stricklin said the city has proposed to assess a flat rate “which is based upon on average historical value of land that we have acquired.” City officials also said there is a wide range in such fees among local governments.

The current methodology of assessing fees is based on a level of service of 7.5 acres per 1,000 residents. City officials said they don’t know how it was formed 15 years ago; the fee is comparable to many communities within the state.

Clearwater’s level of service is 4 acres per 1,000 residents, St. Petersburg’s is 9 acres and Pinellas County’s is 14 acres.

Commissioners placed more emphasis on coming up with a lower fee than changing the level of service.

“It wouldn’t be a good idea to change the level of service,” said Commissioner Woody Brown. “I’m comfortable with the level of service.”

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