

## DeKalb to work on new development policy

*By Chris Rickert - City Editor*

DeKALB - A week after putting a "stay" on the approval of any new housing development, the city council will kick off an effort tonight to craft a policy on residential development that could include higher standards for homebuilding and more impact fees.

Implementing a fee on new homes to help pay for city buildings, such as fire stations, has been one proposed change to the city's approach to housing development. The DeKalb School Board also would like to see the city enact a second impact fee to help it pay for the construction of new schools spurred by a growing population.

City Manager Mark Biernacki also has suggested that homebuilders who want to work in DeKalb might be asked to meet new building and design requirements in their projects, such as one to limit monotony in the design of new homes, or to include more natural materials - like brick and wood - in home construction.

"We're going to pretty much give a menu of ideas to the city council," Biernacki said this morning, and see which ones aldermen want to pursue.

When it comes to potential new impact fees, "The major two that we need to pursue, in my view, are the school district capital fee and the city building fee," he said.

There also could be discussion of implementing so-called transition fees for the school district, he said. They are designed to make up for a funding gap between when a home is built, and presumably occupied by school-aged children, and when property taxes are first collected on it.

The stay, or moratorium, on approval of new housing developments is scheduled to last until Sept. 30. Biernacki said that a draft of the new policy statement could be ready in July, when residents and developers would have a chance to comment on it during a public hearing before the plan commission.

The final statement is expected to be before the council for its OK in September.

City officials have been quick to point out that the "stay" on new housing projects does not mean a stop to all homebuilding or the jobs it creates because there are some 900 residential lots already approved by the city and awaiting construction.

The president of the DeKalb County Building & Development Association said there's little fear that the four-month moratorium could threaten the jobs of the thousands of people employed in building homes, but he did say it would raise the value of annexed home lots, and thus the prices of the homes

built on them.

"I think a moratorium is concerning because it does just drive up cost," Brian Grainger said. "It sends the message of slow growth."

Still, he said that as long as the moratorium remains a short one, it could ultimately have a positive impact by helping to raise building standards and improve the look of the community in the long term. He thought most smaller-scale builders were probably already exceeding the city's existing building standards.

Also tonight, the council will discuss how much the city's 32 nonunion managers should get in annual raises.

A week ago, the council approved 3 percent cost-of-living raises for managers. That figure was revised down from the 3.25 percent raise proposed in May. Shortly after Biernacki became city manager in January 2004, he also revised the city's policy on merit raises for managers. Previously, they could get between 1 percent and 4 percent. Now it's either 2.5 percent or nothing.

Merit raises come on top of the cost-of-living increases, which are automatic.

Biernacki declined to say what percentage of managers had gotten the merit raises in the past.

"It's appropriate to say that certain management employees have not received merit in the past," he said. "But I prefer not to get into specifics at this point."

The city council meets at 7 p.m. today at City Hall, 200 S. Fourth St.

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