

Paying for roads a controversial issue

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By Fraser Sherman

After eight months of debate and discussion, Destin City Council passed new impact fees for parks and library services but decided the new road impact fee required further revision.

Impact fees are imposed on new development to cover the increased demands growth puts on city services. A consultant to the City Council last year that the city's fees fall so short of what Destin needs that they should be increased by a factor of 1. The council eventually settled on doubling the total fees instead.

Tuesday night, however, Councilor Jim Bagby said the new road fee would actually bring in less money, and should be revised so that, at least, it doesn't bring in any less.

The loss of money is because fees have to have a "rational nexus" showing they're proportionate to the demands development puts on city services. The consultant's study found that the city had been charging retail development too much and not enough to residential projects.

Councilor Larry Williges objected to increasing fees on homeowners but cutting them on businesses.

A move to adopt the ordinance provided by the consultant failed 4-3: Dewey Destin, Sam Seevers and Kelly Windes voted y Williges, Ted Corcoran and Jim Bagby voted no, Cyron Marler was absent and Craig Barker broke the tie with a no vote.

Bagby then voted to have staff draw up a revenue-neutral ordinance instead. He said the last thing Destin needed was to receive less money for roads.

Councilor Dewey Destin said that would leave the city operating under its previous road-fee ordinance, which the consultant have shown no longer has a rational nexus. He suggested passing the rejected ordinance after all, then looking at Bagby's proposal down the road.

City Attorney Jerry Miller said the revenue and the effect on homeowners weren't as important as passing an ordinance that hold up if challenged in court.

The council passed the previously rejected ordinance on a 5-1 vote, with Bagby voting no and Marler absent. The council then voted unanimously to have staff draw up a revenue-neutral ordinance and bring it back to council.

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