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Public works committee closes in on a final SDC report

By William Lundquist
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Ontario — The last piece in the system development charge (SDC) puzzle was put in place by the Ontario Public Works Committee Thursday, and committee members will now take a week off to think about writing the SDC ordinance.

The members voted Thursday to recommend the City Council adopt a sector approach to the street transportation portion of commercial SDC rates. Using rates developed by Don Ganer and Associate SDC Revised Methodologies Report and Rate Study as a baseline, the committee voted unanimously to adopt a transportation SDC charge of 40 percent of Ganer's rates for businesses building east of the freeway. That, said committee Vice Chairman Tom Frazier, would result in an SDC transportation charge slightly higher than some in Idaho, but still competitive. The money will be used to pay for new street intersections and traffic signals needed in the rapidly developing area.

To encourage more businesses to build in other areas of Ontario, committee members voted to recommend an SDC rate of 15 percent of Ganer's rate in the area between the railroad track and the freeway, a northern tip of Ontario north of Malheur Drive. Members recommended an SDC rate of 10 percent of Ganer's numbers for the rest of Ontario. Interim Public Works Director Chuck Mickelson liked the recommendation.

"You're not getting anything today," he said. "So with 40 percent, or 10 percent, you're ahead."

Ontario Public Works Committee Chairman Riley Hill said Ganer's job was to come up with rates based on future needs identified in the city's master plan, but the population figures in that plan had been overly optimistic in order to convince the state to allow the city to expand its Urban Growth Boundary. With that accomplished, he said, population estimates should return to a more realistic level.

Ontario Mayor Joe Dominick thought 15 percent for the northern tip sounded a bit low, given the expense of the repair needed on North Oregon Street.

"We're looking for future development. Are you going to ask them to pay for what is already screwed up?" Hill asked.

Committee members voted in recent weeks to recommend the city adopt SDC charges of 100 percent of Ganer's fee schedules for commercial and industrial buildings. The committee recommended the city continue to charge a Utility Capitalization Fee (UCF) of 17 percent on water bills rather than put any new charges on residential buildings. For the transportation portion of the SDCs, the committee settled on 50 percent of Ganer's numbers for residential and industrial structures.

Last week, members reviewed the city's Aug. 21, 2006 SDC ordinance, later repealed, to see how much of it was still applicable. Some members want to leave major portions of the old ordinance, such as the provisions dealing with annexations, out of the new ordinance. Others feel the old ordinance can still provide a framework for the new one, with appropriate modifications. The members agreed to take a week off to work on the ordinance.

digest the old ordinance individually before meeting again at 3 p.m. March 20 to hammer out a new

Once that is accomplished, the committee will present the SDC ordinance to the City Council as a recommendation. The Ontario Public Works Committee has only the power to recommend. Only the Council has the authority to adopt the ordinance and implement SDCs for new buildings. Committee members asked Frazier to make the presentation to the City Council, but all members agreed to attend the meeting to show solidarity.

Committee members also ran into a minor glitch Thursday when they looked through Ganer's new version of his report, the sixth such revision, and discovered the seventh edition of the Institute of Transportation Engineers' Trip Generation Handbook, on which Ganer's transportation rates had been listed as being published in 2003 on one page and 2004 on another. Ganer's latest revision of it had been made solely to straighten out which edition of the Trip Generation Handbook was being used. He had failed to do so because of a typo. Members simply voted to adopt the previous revision of Ganer's Feb. 4 version, with corrections to identify exactly which edition of the handbook Ganer had used.

Another issue revolved around how many of the handbook's classifications to adopt in the SDC method. Ganer wrote interim City Manager Mike Kee that he had included every business classification needed.

"If you adopt the entire manual," Ganer wrote, "it would be unwieldy to try to develop tables like those that are included in the draft report, as they could easily run more than 100 pages."

"We've already identified two or three examples that are hard to identify," Hill said. "How is the staff to do it?"

Kee said applicants could appeal their assigned classifications to the City Council, and he expected them to do so, though he added he would prefer to solve such problems at the staff level. Mickelson suggested appeals go through the Public Works Committee before going to the City Council. Frazier moved that the classifications in the handbook be utilized in cases that are disputed or where a clear definition of a classification is not listed in Ganer's methodology. The members voted unanimously in favor of his motion.

In other Public Works business, Kee ran the latest proposal regarding East Idaho Avenue past committee members for their comments. Kee said the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) wants to take over the maintenance of East Idaho Avenue to the City of Ontario permanently. Kee said the portion of East Idaho Avenue in the freeway area that ODOT is now responsible for needs to be completely ground and repaved. He said ODOT has offered to do that, and also engineer the realignments of Goodfellow and East Lane that the city must do. In addition, ODOT will give the city \$300,000 for Washington Avenue improvements, as well as title to the Kendall Pit and several right-of-way remnants. In return, the city will take over maintenance of East Idaho Avenue forever. Kee called it a good proposal and said ODOT's engineering would provide tremendous savings for the city. Committee members did not agree.

"The only thing gained is authority over intersections," Hill said. "We're given the maintenance forever, but it's not a good deal."

Kee disagreed.

"We would be getting a brand new road," Kee said. "We're doing the maintenance anyway."

Committee member Max Mills said, "I would like to see them (ODOT) maintain it to eternity."