



Impact fee panel gets organized

03/02/2006 -

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LAWRENCEVILLE - Gwinnett's study committee on impact fees started Wednesday searching for questions.

The answers will come later, officials said, but first the eight men brainstormed on the kind of information they will need and how it will come to them.

Wednesday's session was the first for the Impact Fee Study and Advisory Panel, named by the Board of Commissioners last month to give an opinion on whether Gwinnett should charge developers to pay for infrastructure such as roads.

County Administrator Jock Connell said he did not want the county staff to lead the discussion so the administrators would not sway the panel.

"I suspect all of us are going to learn something through this process. I expect there will be great emotion and great passion expressed here," he said. "This is the time to voice things."

The panel brings together David Kesler and Bob Griggs, homeowner advocates who have pushed for impact fees for years, with developers Mike Guynn and Tip Cape and real estate businessman Kerry Armstrong.

So far, the men have stayed in neutral corners, but Michael Sullivan, an attorney who often represents developers, suggested the group's chairman should be impartial at the outset of the discussions.

While the panel did not yet choose a chairman, members did decide to continue using facilitator Jim Vaseff, a Georgia Power official who has agreed to direct the study free of charge.

During the panel's next meeting, University of Georgia economist Jeffrey Dorfman is expected to give an overview of impact fees and Georgia law.

In subsequent meetings, panelists said they wanted to learn about the county's growth, the history of fees here and elsewhere and the relationship between cities and counties involved. Speakers could include a law professor, a representative from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and officials from jurisdictions that collect impact fees and those that decided against it.