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Brunswick councilman wants impact fees for all new homes

by Connor Adams Sheets | Staff Writer

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Brunswick Councilman Jeremy N. Biser says he knows firsthand the dangers of allowing new residents without dedicating funding for city services.

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Biser, a councilman for about one year, started a contentious debate in the city last year over whether to levy an impact fee on the Brunswick Crossing housing development. The fee is dead politically. City council did not vote to commission a formal study to examine the issue.

As a resident of Galyn Manor, a Brunswick development whose residents were required to pay impact fees when it was built, Biser says he understands the burden new developments place on existing city infrastructure and services.

“Galyn Manor was the first new development of any substantial size that the city had to take on in years, so they did the best they could with the information and experience they had at the time,” he said. “But there was no system in place to deal with the impacts that new developments had on the city.”

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Biser says the city is now headed down a similar road with Brunswick Crossing, a 1,500-home development that recently broke ground northwest of downtown Brunswick. He worries that without implementing impact fees, the city will have little recourse to increase services to match growth without raising taxes on existing residents.

However, the mayor, other councilmen and the developer all argue that Brunswick Crossing is already paying its share by helping to fund city projects such as a new wastewater treatment plant. They say that levying an impact fee on the development would put an undue burden on potential residents.

“If you want to kill the project and you don’t want a good addition to your community, you can keep levying impact fees ... We can show that the residents have paid their fair share,” Jerry Connelly, senior vice president of Brunswick Crossing, said.

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Development, the company building Brunswick Crossing, said at the March 25 meeting.

Connelly also points out that once the project is completed, the residential port bring in about \$2.6 million per year in property tax revenue for the city.

“It’s up to the city council to use that money wisely to fund the needs of the ci

Impact fees were not part of the 2002 Brunswick Crossing annexation agreeme residents voted to approve, Jones, Connelly and some councilmen say, so to ad would be akin to breaking a promise.

“I think they’re doing their fair share,” Councilman Ron Bruchey said about th “And I think a handshake is an agreement.”

An independent, preliminary November study said that “impact fees are new g share of city capital facility needs” and recommended a fee of between \$900 ar new home.

At the March 25 meeting, Biser moved that the city commission a formal study pros and cons of levying impact fees on Brunswick Crossing and other new de motion was not seconded, so the proposal died.

In an interview Tuesday, Jones said impact fees are still under serious consider developments, but that he and the council will most likely not vote for them to Brunswick Crossing. Its residents are already helping to foot the city’s bill on c said.

Right now the key roadblock to such a formal study is finding about \$43,000 to

“The impact fee issue will still receive consideration, it’s a matter of the financ The impact fee is not a dead issue,” Jones said. “We’re looking at this and trying to see if we can find finance it over the next two years”

He also said that Brunswick is “going to keep the level of services the same” no matter what the town regarding impact fees.

Some residents, however, agree with Biser, and feel that incoming Brunswick Crossing residents shou fees in order to help fund increases in spending on capital projects, parks and recreation, and police, w necessary for the city to keep pace with new development.

“There’s more to life than water and sewer,” said Michelle Tuwiner, a Brunswick historic district resi at the meeting. “When I call the police, I want that police officer to come, and I don’t want to have to

years to buy the police cars.”

“The types of buyers that are going in there are going to value services more than they’re going to value home price and when you’re talking about a [\$400,000 to \$500,000] home, there’s no buyer who’s going to take it for \$429,000 but I’m not taking it for \$430,000,” he said. “But I tell you what – when you call the police and they don’t respond because they’re on two other calls, then they’re going to be upset. And when you have to expand services, then those are the types of things that are going to happen.”

Brunswick Police Chief J.J. Smith said though he does not take a position on impact fees, police resources are not boosted anytime there is a significant increase in population in order to retain the same level of service.

“It can affect the entire operation – response time, calls for service, everything about the operation,” he said. “If you go to a grocery store and you have a bunch of customers and only one person to handle them, it’s the same principle.”

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