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## Standing room only for impact fee discussion

02/25/08

By **CHARLOTTE PERKINS**

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If Perry needs new fire stations and parks to serve a growing population, as more and more subdivision are built, who should bear the cost? Those who support impact fees believe that since the impact comes from new construction, builders and developers should pay the cost through a fee on each new structure.

Those who are doing the building and developing strongly disagree, and their representatives on the city's Impact Fee Advisory Committee have already won one round with a vote not to have impact fees at all. Local realtors, developers, builders and those in the building supply industries were out in force last Tuesday evening, packing meeting room for the City Council work session and meeting, and were represented by a speaker from the Middle Georgia Board of Realtors and the Warner Robins Homebuilders Association. However, their time to speak out in detail has yet to come. Impact fees, according to Mayor Jim Worrall, will be the subject of more than one public hearing before there is any final vote, and the city is a long way from putting them into effect at this point.

The big issue for the city council is to keep up with the city's need for fire protection, and as the city grows geographically with only one fire station, fire insurance rates will be high for those in the developing areas.

Fire Chief Joel Gray said the most pressing need is for a firehouse with apparatus in the Matt Arthur School area. This would actually be a multi-purpose facility for both fire and police protection, and designed in such a way that bays could be added to house not just fire trucks but also possibly an ambulance if the county wanted to locate an EMS team there. The city is anticipating the future to need to build fire stations in several more locations, including one near the Georgia national Fairgrounds, one in the Houston Spring area, and – still later – one near Kings Chapel and Arena Roads and one on Langston Road.

City council members also are considering funding the development of additional parks through impact fees, which can only be used for land acquisition and buildings – not for ongoing operations.

Ron Cooper, speaking for the realtors and builders, told the council that impact fees would hinder industrial growth. He argued that industries seeking new site would learn on the Internet that Perry had impact fees and would not even

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consider coming here. He also said that Perry already had the highest permitting fees and highest millage rate of the area.

The Impact Fee Advisor Committee, which has voted not to have impact fees, made recommendations earlier in case the impact fees were voted in anyway. These, as reported by City Planner Mike Beecham, included limiting the expenditures to one fire station with apparatus and not funding any parks. Realtor Scott Free, who is a member of the committee, said that he did not think the parks that Perry already has were being used, but also argued that with the trend toward building Planned Unit Developments, developers were already including green space and recreational parks in their subdivisions.

Also at the meeting, Mayor Jim Worrall spoke in honor of E.L. Lewis, who died last week, honoring Lewis for his dedication to the community and his attendance at countless city council meetings. "We will miss him as a friend and as a concerned citizen," the mayor said.



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