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Published Thursday, May 12, 2005 Nixa likely to adopt impact fees

Fees on new homes would help pay for police, sewer and park services.

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Nixa — Landowners will probably have to pay more to build homes in Nixa starting next month.

The Nixa Board of Aldermen on Wednesday voted to have city staff members prepare ordinances on three impact fees, which would amount to \$1,404 for a single-family home.

The board could change its mind and not approve the ordinances in June, but it didn't appear likely.

"I don't think it's probable, but it's possible," said Nixa Mayor Doug Marrs.

The Wednesday votes came as no surprise to Matt Morrow, executive director of the Home Builders Association of Greater Springfield.

"It's hard to stand between a governmental body and a big pile of money," said Morrow, whose group has opposed impact fees, which are levied on new construction to help pay for public infrastructure needed by new growth.

In Nixa, staff members have said new growth demands that the city keep up its police, park and municipal facilities as well as provide adequate sewer services. But the city also has found it does not have enough revenue for such capital projects.

In 2003, the city hired a consultant to study the feasibility of impact fees. By January 2004, Tischler & Associates reported that the city could charge up to \$3,035 in impact fees for a new single-family home.

Fourteen months and several public meetings later, city employees said the fees could be slashed to \$1,569 in four categories: \$435 for parks, \$165 for municipal facilities, \$106 for police and \$863 for sewer services.

In April, the board voted to endorse the concept of impact fees.

"We must spend money when new people move in," Marris said in April. "The discussion is ... how do we pay for that."

Some believe new construction should shoulder part of that cost, while many builders argue that impact fees are an unfair and unreliable funding source that stifle growth and drive up housing costs.

But Marris said he does not think impact fees will slow down growth in the Nixa area, which has many open lots.

Also, the fees are "minimum" compared to the entire cost of a house, Marris said.

Alderman Steve Tallaksen shared some of Morrow's concerns when he voted against the idea of impact fees last month.

"It's against economic development," Tallaksen said then.

At the Wednesday meeting, Tallaksen said nay to all impact fees except that for police.

"I'm not in favor of any of them," he said. "But if I have to pick one, it's the police."

That is because the city is already behind in providing police protection, Tallaksen said.

No one on the board favored an impact fee for municipal facilities.

Alderman Chris Thomas noted a bigger city building would benefit everyone.

With three 5-1 votes, the board decided to proceed with park, police and sewer impact fees.

Tallaksen voted against the park and sewer impact fees, and Thomas said no to the police impact fee.

Now the job is for the city attorney and other city employees to draft the ordinances.

If approved, the proposed sewer fee will replace the current fee of \$250.

City Administrator Brian Bingle said the impact fees would be collected when a building permit is requested.

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