

Parks in Duvall

Rob Millard, Duvall



Parks, parks, everywhere and no one to pay for them. This seems to be the new motto of the Duvall City Council. Last night they approved an ordinance increasing the Park Impact Fee a staggering 122%. Essentially this will increase from approximately \$1900 per home to \$4100 per home. This fee will be applied to any new construction projects within the city. Not only will this fee cover new parks but it will also be used to cover some of the costs of our existing parks as well. The Council essentially said “No taxing my backyard; make the new guy pay for it, regardless of the primary goal of the lands committee which is to offer affordable housing in Duvall.”

Two of the council members urged the council wait to take action on this until the economy could support the fee increase. Council Member Edwards asked that the council reconsider because “This is not a standard increase, this is a massive increase in fees, and no one can afford this in these economic times.” Council Member Laughlin asked the council to poll the citizens before they act to see if this is really what the people wanted given the hard economic times. Of the dozen or so people who testified during the hearing only 2 supported the increase in fees and one of them was David Carson, Redmond City Councilman who praised Duvall for taking this action because it would drive builders to Redmond and would help that city to get out of the housing slowdown much faster. Long time citizen Ray Burhen asked the council if they were living in Never Never Land by proposing this fee and he urged them to come back to reality.

All the other members of the council voted in favor of the fee increase but each having their own reasons for doing so. Council Member Brudnicki stated that she was voting to increase the fee so she could complete a campaign promise she made two years ago when the economy was flourishing. She quoted from her campaign flyer which states “I promise that tax dollars would be applied responsibly.” And then went on to say that “this is what the people voted for.” But from the reactions of the citizens it appears they don’t agree. Council Member Walker agreed that the fee was “the way to go” because she has “come to the conclusion that the fees have little impact on the cost of a home.” Yet she offered no support of her statement. Council Member Cattin was supportive of the plan because it provided a place for families to safely play and gather and “if we are going to delay economic growth then I’m OK with that.” Council Member Gill said it was in the best long term interest of the community and that “going forward you have to bite the bullet to get things done. Council Member Kuntz said his job was to “do what’s best for the community and you can’t go wrong.”

Which leaves us with the obvious question, Is this what’s best for the community? Is it adding additional burden to the already depressed housing market to over commit for parks that aren’t needed because current parks are under-capacity and can absorb additional growth? One question that wasn’t answered by the council members last night – where will the city come up with its portion of the park fees? The parks plan commits existing users to funding \$1.8 million in the next 6 years. The current fund balance is \$73,000. If five of the council members are so quick to raise impact fees 122%, what will stop them from raising citizens’ taxes? This is the principal question that the voters need to address in this November. Are these council members what’s best for the community?

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