



Tuesday, Jan 6, 2009

Posted on Fri, Dec. 19, 2008

Georgetown County planners support fees for building

Georgetown to consider addition of impact charges

By Aliana Ramos

aramos@thesunnews.com

Deciding that newcomers should pay for the infrastructure improvements needed with growth, the Georgetown County Planning Commission voted in favor of proposed impact fees Thursday night.

The proposal - which calls for tacking on thousands of dollars in fees on new buildings to help build parks, libraries, roads, a judicial center and to expand the jail - will be sent on to Georgetown County Council for a final decision.

"We have to look at these things and think about who pays," said commission member Marvin Neal. "It shouldn't be those [taxpayers] who are paying now."

The county has about \$330 million in projects in its Visions II capital improvement plan, which hopes to help meet the future needs of county residents.

By 2030 the county's population is expected to increase from 62,294 to 82,049 people.

If the four new impact fees are approved, they are expected to generate about \$2.4 million a year, according to a study prepared by planning consulting firm TischlerBise.

The impact fees would be collected when a building permit for a new home, business, hospital or other structure is issued.

Because of the slowdown in the housing market, developers asked whether the fees would hurt rather than help.

"I love Georgetown County," said developer Donald Smith. "I want it to be all that it can. I think it's unfair to put [additional millions] on one industry that already is on life support. I'm not against impact fees. But, \$7,000 [per home] on the Waccamaw Neck, that's a hunk of change to put on somebody."

There would be four fees: one each for parks, libraries, law enforcement and roads. Some of the fees would be applied to all new construction; the fees for parks and libraries would only be applied to residential units. The fees also vary depending on size, use and location within the county.

The fees vary, from \$5 per unit up to \$5,750 per unit. For example, a new home around the Choppee section could generate about \$5,098 in road, park, library and law enforcement impact fees.

Developer Richard Weston said the fees also would add to construction costs and eventually affect the home buyer.

"This is a new tax," Weston said. "Impact fee is a rather deceitful way to put in a new tax. ... This is another \$10,000 that will be added to the price of homes. I don't think this is the time to do that."

The county contracted with Tyson Smith, who has worked with other governments in implementing impact fees, to help develop the ordinance.

"Is this the right time to start impact fees?" Smith said. "It's up to you to decide. I know in Florida some of their governments have put off impact fees or had them repealed. It has not increased building permits. What will stop growth is a lack of infrastructure capacity."

The County Council will have three readings to consider the impact fee ordinance. It will be up to the county to decide if and when to start the fees.

Commission member Tommy Edwards, a former county administrator, worked on the Visions II plan.

"During the Visions process it became clear that Georgetown County needed a comprehensive plan for the future," Edwards said. "What we heard over and over again from residents was, 'I don't want to pay for the improvements other people are causing.'"

Commission member Glenda Shoulette also supported the impact fees.

"I've lived up and down the East Coast," said Shoulette, whose husband is a developer. "People who build in other areas pay impact fees. This is not a new concept. We have to look long-range. We have needs, and they need to be addressed."

At a glance

Parks and recreation | Unincorporated Andrews, \$973 to \$1,317; unincorporated Choppee, \$1,917 to \$2,595, unincorporated Georgetown, \$1,589 to \$2,152; unincorporated Waccamaw Neck, \$1,786 to \$2,418.

Library | \$303 to \$685 per residential unit

Law enforcement | \$332 to \$750 per residential unit; \$5 to \$535 per nonresidential unit

Roads | \$1,200 to \$2,380 per residential unit, \$220 to \$5,750 per nonresidential unit

Contact ALIANA RAMOS at 443-2434.

© 2009 MyrtleBeachOnline.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com>