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Reno council moves toward impact fee vote

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While approving a preliminary step toward new impact fees, the Reno City Council heard Wednesday it will have plenty of time to decide whether to go through with the program to help pay for new police, fire and park facilities.

The fees on new development would help pay for up to three police stations, six fire stations and new parks. As required by state law, current property owners would have to pay their fair share for the new facilities and that could require higher taxes.

The council would have five more opportunities to stop the program, said John Hester, community development director. Last year, before the worst of the recession hit, the council asked staff to have an impact fee ordinance ready for final approval by December.

Hester said builders and developers have asked for a joint workshop with the council and the Planning Commission to re-consider the fees, in late September or October.

The council Wednesday approved assumptions, including adding 4,800 more residents a year, that will go into a list of capital projects such as police stations over the next decade. That list and fee amounts would go to the council in October, with a final vote on impact fees in December.

Councilwoman Jessica Sferrazza, the only council member who spoke, opposed to the new fees.

"There's no building going on," Sferrazza said, asking if the proposed fees would make the difference between a contractor building or not.

Through July, builders obtained permits to build only 155 single-family homes in Reno. That's down from nearly 3,000 permits during the boom years of 2004 and 2005.

Sferrazza also said existing residents don't need to be burdened with added taxes or fees right now because of 12 percent unemployment and the recession. She said the city should concentrate on

ending the foreclosure crisis so people stop losing money on their homes in the depressed real estate market.

“Everybody is struggling right now,” she said.

If the fees were imposed, the city would have five years to start planning the new facilities and 10 years to get them built. If not, the impact fee money, plus interest, would have to returned to the property owners. The police stations alone are estimated to cost \$65 million.
