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Article published Aug 7, 2008

Rochester Planning Board votes to table review of impact fee schedules

ROCHESTER — The Planning Board chair's attempts to get the board thinking again about impact fees were defeated once more Monday, just days before a public hearing.

The board voted 6-3 against Chair Terry Desjardin's suggestion the panel take off the table creation of a fee schedule outlining which city services should benefit from revenue from new construction. The board voted to table review in June.

Meanwhile, the City Council's Codes and Ordinance Committee is reviewing impact fee ordinance changes suggested by the board.

Desjardins said it would be smart for the board to work on the schedule in tandem with the council's review.

"I truly believe there are some Planning Board members that don't believe in the ordinance," she said. "It doesn't make sense that we've spent all this money to have people come in and present to us schedules and still wait for the council" to weigh in.

The board has final approval of the fee schedule, but council input will be sought, Desjardins said.

Voting with Desjardins were Richard Groat and Tom Abbott, the city's assistant code enforcement director. Voting against, Desjardins said, were: Alan Dews, Dave Meader, Tim Fontneau, Eugene McCarthy, Lance Powers and Councilor Ray Varney, who recently supported council review of the ordinance despite reservations.

Board members have expressed reservations with the program for some time, with some saying the fees will increase housing costs.

A public hearing will be held at 7 p.m. tonight at the start of the codes committee's meeting at City Hall. Driving the hearing are a handful of changes to Chapter 42, Section 31 of the city's ordinances.

Changes include:

- n Altering the term "new development" so it's clear the net increase in floor area in a conversion of one existing use to another is what drives a "net increase in public demand of public capital facilities."

- n Giving the Planning Board the ability to waive the fee if it determines the collection and administration of fees "will exceed its value to the city."

n Remove the City Council from the equation when the board decides whether to accept a contribution of real property or facility improvements of equivalent value and use to the public in lieu of a cash impact fee payment.
