



Sycamore again debates impact fees

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By Dennis Hines

Impact fees have, once again, become a topic of debate among Sycamore leaders.

During a recent ad hoc committee meeting, officials from the Sycamore Park Board requested that their impact fees be increased. Representatives from the Sycamore School District and Sycamore Public Library requested that their impact fees not be adjusted at this time. Members of the ad hoc committee then decided not to increase impact fees.

Members of the Sycamore City Council discussed the issue during their Jan. 21 meeting. Ted Strack, commissioner for the Sycamore Park Board, said according to his research and a report that was presented last summer, the park district's impact fees are a third of what they should be.

"The impact fees that I derived at with my very simplistic approach, were very, very close to what the impact fee study said they should be," Strack said. "So it just confirms, in my eyes and the park board's eyes, that the findings in that study were accurate, and the city council should accept the findings of that study as it relates to the park district."

Mayor Ken Mundy asked Strack what would the park district do if the impact fees were increased. Strack said they would require developers to donate land for neighborhood parks.

"Our research has indicated that there's a significant number of people in the city who like parks in their neighborhood. That's one of the things they want," Strack said. "So we will require new developments, within reason, to have neighborhood parkland."

Strack said they also would require developers to contribute funding for community parks.

"The cash would allow us to make a choice of what we're going to do, maybe improve a neighborhood park, maybe improve the swimming pool, maybe buy some dirt for a soccer field," Strack said. "It give us the financial flexibility, so we have some cash to do some positive things. You don't want to be land rich and cash poor. That's a bad situation."

David Peek, executive director for the Sycamore Park District, said the park district has limited sources of funding. He said the park district is not allowed to implement a sales tax or a transfer tax.

"The park board really struggles, every year, with our revenue sources. We are really limited on our revenue sources as compared to other local units of government," Peek said. "We're very hamstrung as for as the ability to raise funds to maintain our parks, to develop new parks and to renovate our existing parks. It's not an easy task."

Members of the city council said they would be willing to enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the park district if they could confirm that the city would not be held liable if the impact fees were challenged in court.

The council members said they also would consider developing an ordinance to increase the park district's impact fees.

"If you could hold us harmless out of court, and it's defensible and that's what you need to keep the quality of life at what we expect it to be for future generations here in Sycamore, I'm all for it," First Ward Alderman Alan Bauer told Peek and Strack.

Fourth Ward Alderman Darren Knuth said he would be willing to increase the impact fees for the park district.

"I feel if the park district needs greater impact fees, then we have an obligation to do whatever we can to see that they get it," Knuth said.

Fourth Ward Alderman Terry Kessler said she would like to review the park district's information more closely before deciding on whether to increase the impact fees.

"I'm not saying I would agree to it or not agree to it. I just need to be educated to be sure I make the decision based on correct information," Kessler said.

First Ward Alderman Richard Neubauer said he would like to know why the school district has not asked for an impact fee increase. Second Ward Alderman Chuck Stowe said that if school district officials felt that their impact fees needed to be adjusted, they would approach the city council.

"I'm not going to examine what they're doing. If they're not going to come here to us and say we need more money, I'm not going to tell an elected body how much more money they need," Stowe said. "If they got enough money, I'm not going to change anything."

The council members are set to discuss the issue again during a future meeting.

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