
Impact fee panelists draw different conclusions

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LAWRENCEVILLE — After three hours of conversation Monday, two members of an advisory panel left with dramatically different ideas about the possibility of developer impact fees in the county.

Bob Griggs said the Department of Public Utilities' use of system development charges to pay for upgrades to the water and sewer system proved that developers could pay for infrastructure needed for development. But another member, Tip Cape, who frequently pays the charges as an executive for Bowen Family Homes, said switching to impact fees would keep the county from charging hundreds of thousands of dollars to operate developer-built sewage pumping stations.

"We are already charging fees for stuff we couldn't charge impact fees for," he said. It is against Georgia law to use impact fees for government operations, only infrastructure. "It's going to be a challenge to figure out the advantages and disadvantages."

During Monday's meeting, the third of a panel appointed by the Board of Commissioners to consider the controversial impact fee idea, county department staff briefed members on how the fees could fit into the county's revenue stream.

The Department of Public Utilities is the only department charging developers — at a rate of about \$3,600 a house — for water and sewer upgrades.

Department Director Frank Stephens said the charges don't conform with impact fee laws exactly but act similarly.

Griggs, a panelist who has pushed for the fees for years, said he thought the department served as an example.

"I'm sure the water and sewer folks wouldn't tell you it's not working," he said.

For other departments, the idea is more complicated.

Transportation Director Brian Allen said the fees could not be used to upgrade intersections that are already congested, and because fees have to be divided into districts and spent in the area they are collected, the county

could have problems for roads that cross district lines.

Even Griggs admits the fees likely won't work for the Police Department, which only has five precincts and isn't likely to add more because police are on the street more than they are within the precinct.

But he said the Fire Department could take advantage of a fee. Assistant Chief Bob Post said the county builds a new station when response times reach more than eight minutes either because of distance, traffic or a high-flow of calls.

That department, as well as the police, transportation, library and parks and recreation agencies, use money from a penny sales tax to fund building projects today.

"I'm still learning," said another panelist Mike Levengood. "This was very helpful."