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Impact fees are good for business

Marana used to be known as a developer's nirvana. Not any more. The Town Council is considering levying an impact fee of \$9,000 per new home built in the northern end of town. It is a progressive and responsible way to spread the cost of growth equitably.

The city of Tucson, among the last of Pima County's municipalities to adopt an impact fee, plans to phase in a fee that amounts to about half that -up to \$4,600 or so. Pima County's impact fee is about \$3,500.

Oro Valley charges an impact fee for roads and water of more than \$4,000 per home. While Marana's fee may be the highest in Pima County, in Maricopa County impact fees can be much higher. Depending on the municipality and the size of the home, fees can be as much as \$19,000.

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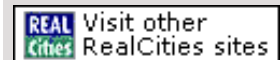
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The average fee statewide is more than \$6,000.

Critics of impact fees argue that all residents benefit from growth so even those who have lived here for many years, including some who never paid impact fees, should help finance it. The flaw in that argument is that when growth accelerates sharply, the costs of paying for roads, parks and other infrastructure needs outpace revenue. That's when municipal governments become strapped and infrastructure requirements slide. Impact fees help prevent cities and towns from falling behind.

Marana's proposed fee breaks down to \$6,315 for transportation and \$3,088 for parks. The fees would be allocated for North Marana, Jim DeGrood, executive assistant to the town manager, told Star reporter Dan Sorenson. DeGrood also said he didn't necessarily expect residential developers to fork over cash. Instead, he hopes they will negotiate improvement credits with the town. Builders usually can build roads more cheaply than the town, said DeGrood, adding, "If I don't have to collect a cent, I'm pleased."

The town has had an impact fee of more than \$2,400 per home since 2001, but that is for construction in the southern part of town. No fee existed previously for the town's north side.

If the town council approves this fee, it will be the second in about three years. Oddly enough, the city of Tucson didn't get around to imposing a similar impact fee until Sept. 27. In the weeks before the city passed its impact fee, opponents argued, this additional cost would stifle growth. Opponents did not mention that Marana and Oro Valley had adopted impact fees years ago without suffering decreased growth rates.

The fact is that the demand for homes is as brisk as ever, and nowhere is that better illustrated than in the short history of Gladden Farms. The town council approved construction of the first 245 of a proposed 1,900 homes in this development in north Marana in January 2003. Since then, demand has boosted home values. Gladden Farms as yet has just a smattering of people living there. It's that new.

Thus, with Gladden Farms' soaring demand, developers not only should consider impact fees as a cost of doing business, but also as a key element in promoting growth. Those fees ensure that residential areas will have the roads and parks necessary to sustain growth. That's just good business.

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