



County may raise subdivision fees

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By CHELSI MOY of the Missoulian

A proposal before county commissioners this week to increase land-use permit fees - primarily on developers - may cause slightly higher housing prices for future homeowners.

It's been more than a decade since the county has bumped up the price of subdivision permits and zoning applications, said Office of Planning and Grants Director Roger Millar. The current rates allow the county to recover as little as 5 percent of what it costs to review a steadily increasing number of subdivision permit and zoning requests, he said.

But developers say the real burden will fall on the backs of future homeowners.

"It's the end-user that always pays all these fees," said Don Garramone, president of Garramone Builders Inc. "It's never the builder or developer."

Right now, developers interested in building a 100-lot subdivision pay a total of \$2,150 to obtain a permit from the county. If commissioners Wednesday approve the fee increases, a permit for that same-size subdivision would now cost a total of \$10,000.

Broken down, that could mean an additional \$100 tacked onto a \$210,000 home.

"This is not everybody's favorite topic, but it's time to address it," Millar said.

Taxpayers foot as much as 95 percent of what it costs to review new subdivisions and zoning applications. In comparison, places like McCall, Idaho, require developers to pay the entire cost of county subdivision review, Millar said.

If the proposed fee increase passes, taxpayers and the private developers would, for the most part, split the cost down the middle.

That recognizes the fact that both the community and the developers benefit from the county reviewing new subdivision proposals, he said. Missoula area residents benefit from county officials traveling to the site of the proposed subdivision to identify environmental implications, potential traffic concerns and take into consideration public comments, Millar said.

At the same time, the benefit to the developer is approval of their subdivision - some worth millions and millions of dollars.

The county has sat down with members of the building industry to discuss the proposed fee increases. And while Garramone recognizes the county's need to recover more of its cost of doing business, he said it's hard to swallow fee increases in an incremental fashion.

"We'll pay for it, but we want it to be easier on us," he said. "We would like them to look at all the fee increases together instead of a user fee here, impact fee there and then require us to install a \$6,000 fire system."

Garramone sees the fee increase as nothing more than a tax on new homes, he said.

"You are asking us to provide affordable housing, but then our fees go up and up and up," he said.

Commissioners will take public comment before voting on the proposed fee increase Wednesday at their weekly meeting at 1:30 p.m. at the County Commissioners office. If passed, a drafted resolution indicates that the fee would go into effect July 1.

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