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Fee on new homes would pay for parks

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PLAINFIELD -- The Plainfield Town Council has taken the first step toward imposing an \$850 fee on each new home to help pay for the town's growing network of parks and trails.

An eight-page ordinance to create a park impact fee was introduced Monday night, with further action and a public hearing this month.

The proposed ordinance says the estimated \$400,000 a year from the fee would be used for several purposes, including new parks and recreation facilities. It also could pay for bonds or loans used to build parks.

If the council approves the fee, Plainfield would join other suburban communities enacting impact fees for parks, roads, schools, storm sewers and other purposes.

The Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis said the park impact fee proposed in Plainfield seems consistent with other communities, which usually charge \$700 to \$1,100 per home.

Hendricks County-based builders agree with the fee if it would enhance Plainfield's parks, the Splash Island swimming park and the Plainfield Recreation Center.

"I'm not terribly excited about the added costs," said local builder Brad Whicker, "but this is my hometown, and the town has a great deal of pride in its parks. There is a real need for dollars to help the parks continue to grow."

Whicker served on the community task force that studied impact fees.

The Plainfield Plan Commission voted 6-0 last week to recommend the Town Council approve the fee at \$850 per home. It could take effect Jan. 1.

"That would allow nearly six months for all the builders to adjust to the new fee, and it can be included in the contracts" for home construction, Whicker said.

Parks Director Clay Chafin said the money could help with the department's \$3.5 million annual budget and with new facilities, such as more trails or a possible addition to the recreation center.

A 1991 state law set up the procedures for local governments to enact impact fees under a formula to determine the fair amount.

Steve Lains, chief executive officer of the builders group, said most communities hire a consultant or ask the group's help in making that calculation.

"From our standpoint on behalf of builders, we support the impact fees as enacted by state law," he said.

Plainfield hired independent consultants and included builders plus residents on the task force to set the fee.

The ordinance gives a developer or builder an option, with town approval, to build a public park instead of paying cash to the town. Otherwise, the fee is paid when a builder applies for a permit to start construction.

Typically, new home builders pass the cost along to buyers. It does not affect the sales of

existing houses.

Elsewhere in the metro region, the builders association helped Pittsboro in northern Hendricks County calculate the park impact fee there at about \$1,000 per home last year, when that town approved the fee.

Also last year, the Zionsville Town Council ignored the recommendation of its study committee and consultant who suggested a park fee near \$1,000. Instead, the council adopted \$1,862. The builders group's suit over that action is pending in Boone Superior Court.