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County, cities inch closer to new road levy

BY RAY PITZ
The Beaverton Valley Times, Jul 12, 2007

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Washington County leaders generally agree that it's time to ask voters if they're willing to sign off on initiatives to improve roads.

On Monday, members of the Washington County Coordinating Committee – comprised of mayors, county commissioners, city councilors and other officials – met to gauge interest in an eventual ballot measures to increase the county's traffic impact fee and a separate request for a new countywide Major Streets Transportation Improvement Program.

Traffic impact fees are assessed on new developments based on the number of vehicle trips a development generates. Voters can amend that rate, which was approved countywide in 1990.

Meanwhile, officials will look into going back to voters for a new Major Streets Transportation Improvement Program. The first program was approved by voters in 1986, a joint effort by the county and cities to build new roads, sidewalks, bridges and bike lanes. Funding is collected through property taxes.

Based on Monday's meeting, Washington County Commissioner Roy Rogers, who also leads the committee, said he would ask county staff to develop a specific plan on what roads could be earmarked for work on a future MSTIP list.

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“There’s nothing defined at this point,” Rogers emphasized.

However, he said that if there was no disagreement, the committee should look at sending a measure to voters in November 2008.

City fees

Discussion could continue on whether a request to increase the traffic impact fee should be sent to voters sooner, said Rogers.

“I do still think our TIF (traffic impact fee) is too low,” he said.

Forest Grove City Manager Michael Sykes said from a political standpoint it might be too ambitious to ask voters to approve an increase in the traffic impact fees along with asking for approval of an MSTIP at the same time.

Steve Kelley, a senior planner for the county, said that the traffic impact fee pays only for a portion of future road needs and is part of a tax that can be raised annually by 6 percent to adjust for inflation.

Half of the money collected from those fees must go to improvements made to arterial roadways.

Members of the committee also discussed whether cities should create a two-tiered approach in funding road improvements.

One scenario includes keeping the current traffic impact fee and implementing system development charges for cities and the county to supplement local projects.

Another proposal would create a new traffic impact fee and each jurisdiction would adopt SDCs for local needs.

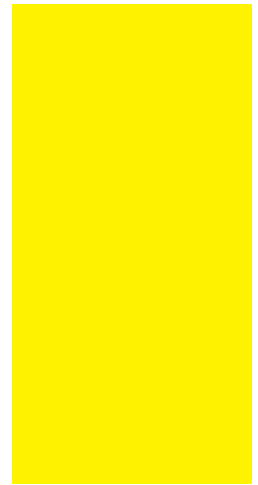
Coordinating committee members were in general agreement that the impact fees, which collected \$17.7 million last year, should remain in place in one form or another.

“I’m always reluctant to throw away what we already have,” said Rogers.

Also, Herb Hirst, a member of the North Plains City Council, said from a small city point of view, a countywide system development charge most likely would only benefit larger cities.

Rogers said the committee would hold further discussions on the transportation topics at the committee’s Aug. 6 meeting set for noon at the Beaverton City Library.

That meeting will include talk of possible ranges in the amount of increasing impact fees.



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