

Bonita council talks impact fee increases

By Elizabeth Wright

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Plan to build a sit-down restaurant, bank or daycare center in Bonita Springs later this year?

Prepare to pay more in impact fees.

If the Bonita Springs City Council finalizes a new fee schedule a consultant is recommending, road impact fees for those types of buildings will be higher than in Fort Myers, Cape Coral or anywhere else in Lee County.

For other types of new construction, road impact fees would remain just below what developers pay to build in unincorporated Lee County.

If approved, the new rates would mean a developer of a single-family home in Bonita Springs would pay \$8,211 to help the city pay for new roads in the area, up from the current rate of \$5,647, but still lower than the county rate of \$8,976.

Overall, the new rates would be a large increase over current road impact fees in the city. In some cases, such as for private school buildings, the fees would more than double.

Road impact fees are supposed to be based on much new traffic new construction projects will bring to city roads. Proposed fees would range from \$1,453 for a mini-warehouse up to \$32,348 for constructing a new fast-food restaurant, which presumably would generate more traffic than any other sort of construction.

The City Council accepted a consultant's recommendations to raise the fees Wednesday, making it likely the new fees will go into effect later this year, possibly as soon as Nov. 15.

Jim Duncan, a consultant with Duncan and Associates, the firm that suggested the new fees, told the council the increases would be necessary to keep up with the cost of building roads in the city, particularly any work widening existing roads or building new bridges.

"That should not be a surprise because the cost of everything has gone up," Duncan said.

While that may be true for some aspects of construction, Michael Reitmann, executive director of the Lee Building Industry Association, said one of the factors that goes into calculating impact fees is the cost of land, and he said that has been going down over the past year in Bonita Springs.

But that's a quibble Reitmann said he doesn't expect the Council will listen to.

He's no fan of impact fee increases, but he expects them to be approved.

"At this point, when it comes to impact fees, it's almost futile," Reitmann said.

Still, he thinks the fee increase will have negative impact on development in the area.

What building is going on in Bonita Springs now is commercial, he said, and even an increase of a few thousand dollars could make a difference in whether something gets built.

“You would think municipalities would be more sensitive,” he said.

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