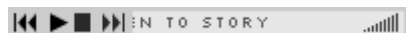




Inland News

S.B. County explores development fee



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By IMRAN GHORI

The Press-Enterprise

San Bernardino County supervisors are taking a cautious first step toward considering a fee on development to pay for services such as jails, libraries and parks.

The Board of Supervisors agreed Tuesday to commission a study to explore the idea, but it could be 18 to 24 months before it considers whether to enact any development-impact fees.

The study, which could cost around \$400,000, would look at the county's infrastructure needs and how much could be raised through development fees, said Assistant County Administrator Norm Kanold.

Another study that would show the link between development and the need for capital projects also would be completed, Kanold said.

How much money would be raised and what exactly it could be spent on remains to be determined.

Supervisors expressed general support for the concept but questioned how to go about imposing fees in an equitable manner.

Last year, the San Bernardino County grand jury recommended that the county look at implementing development fees, describing them as untapped resources that could pay for many of the services needed to keep up with a growing population.

"We've missed an opportunity for some time," Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt said.

Since 1987, the state has allowed cities and counties to exact a one-time fee on development.

Most of the cities in the county have development fees of some sort in place. Riverside County has had an ordinance in place for six years.

Riverside County collected \$28 million last year from its fees, which are divided into 20 area plans and pay for services ranging from courts to libraries to parks, said Serena Chow, a senior management analyst for Riverside County.

San Bernardino County last considered development-impact fees in 1990, but the board abandoned the idea because the real-estate industry was in a slump, Kanold said.

With the housing market again experiencing a slowdown, building industry officials are urging county officials to take the process slowly.

Carlos Rodriguez, a representative for the Building Industry Association, said his group is concerned about how new fees could affect the affordability of homes.

"It's no secret that things have cooled in our county," Rodriguez said.

Supervisors promised that the building industry would be consulted as part of the process.

"This is not something we're looking at for now," Supervisor Josie Gonzales said. "This is long term."

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