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Proposed impact fee reduced

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Last Updated: Wednesday, Aug 8 2007 9:14 PM

A proposed fee to pay for Bakersfield's highway projects got smaller this week after city officials decided to apply it to the entire city.

That means the new fee, expected to be applied to all new construction, will total \$2,487 per home. That's \$378 less than the fee proposed by City Manager Alan Tandy just last week.

That old proposal would have covered new development within two miles of the planned highway projects, which is most of the city, but not the developed core. The new proposal "closes the doughnut hole," Tandy said.

The Bakersfield City Council's Planning and Development Committee Wednesday recommended that the full council consider adopting the fee Aug. 29.

Developers, who came out against the fee last week, voiced objections again Wednesday.

New homebuyers are being asked to bear the burden of paying for \$928 million of a \$1.6 billion series of projects, said Roger McIntosh, a development consultant.

City Councilman Ken Weir said he agreed the fee was a far-from-ideal solution but he doesn't know of any better ones.

"At this point in time I'm not sure we have that many options," he said.

"If we had a half-cent sales tax we'd use it, but we don't," said Councilman Zack Scrivner.

The fee won't even fund all of the city's projected needs. It covers only the projects partially paid for with \$630 million former Rep. Bill Thomas, R-Bakersfield, secured before leaving office, plus the Westside Parkway. The city's planned highway system includes another \$790 million in costs.

The Thomas money doesn't cover all the costs of the projects, and the city needs to come up with a credible financing plan for covering the gap or it will lose the federal money, Tandy explained. And the possible half-cent sales tax, which failed last November, isn't a credible plan in the feds' eyes.

The city would have to sell about \$200 million in bonds, which would be paid for by the impact fees as new construction occurs, Tandy said.

One plan that's still possible is a three-tiered fee schedule with lower traffic impact fees for developments in the city core and higher fees for developments farther out. Scrivner proposed that idea last week because, he said, developments built farther out have more impact on the city's road system.

City staff will do the math on that proposal and come back to the committee with a fee proposal at

a later date, possibly in the next couple of weeks, so that the committee can change its recommendation to the full council if it wants.

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