

County calls for study on development fees

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San Bernardino County Sun

Article Launched:08/08/2007 12:00:00 AM PDT

Seventeen years after a failed bid to create developer impact fees in unincorporated areas, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors is again tackling the issue.

On Tuesday, the board voted unanimously to study how to implement a fee and determine the direct value between the county's infrastructure needs in those areas, compared with how much the county would charge the developers.

Everyone involved seemed to believe the county needed to be charging developers an impact fee, which raises money for construction or expansion of the county's capital facilities that benefit the new development.

How quickly that could happen is far from determined.

But it appears it will take as long as two full years before anything could take place. County staff will put together a request for proposals over the next three months to find a consultant - who is expected to be paid up to \$400,000 for the study.

Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, who represents the High Desert, where most of the county's unincorporated land can be found, said officials just need to look outside the county to find some answers.

"I think you'll find we're behind the curve," Mitzelfelt said. "We've missed an opportunity for some time."

A county grand jury has also urged the supervisors to create a fee structure.

Bob Nelson, a High Desert resident who failed in his bid to be appointed to the 1st District seat last year, said it has already been too long.

A 1987 study predicted that the county would eventually be unable to afford its infrastructure needs, he said, while another study figured the county could have raised \$1.5billion in such fees by 2030.

Failing to implement such fees has led to unnecessary fatal accidents on roads either poorly maintained or with an inadequate police presence, he said.

"People are dying," he said. "Think about the people."

In 1990, the board conducted a study into the fees but eventually rejected the proposal, said Norm Kanold, assistant county administrator. A prime reason, he said, was because the region's housing market was heading into a downturn.

That argument appears to be returning.

Carlos Rodriguez, a senior official with the Building Industry Association's Rancho Cucamonga- based Baldy View Chapter, cited the region's current sluggish market for reasons to move slowly on any new fees.

"We caution the timing," he said. "It's no secret that things have cooled in our market."

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