

The Morning News

Local News for Northwest Arkansas

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Resolution Could Revive Road Impact Fees

By [Dug Begley](#)

THE MORNING NEWS

FAYETTEVILLE -- They're back. Maybe.

Proposed road impact fees in Fayetteville could get another chance at success with noticeable changes if the City Council passes a resolution Aug. 21. Council member Lioneld Jordan submitted a resolution urging the staff to solicit input from the public, politicians and business officials and come up with road impact fees everyone can stomach.

Jordan, who championed the proposed road impact fees prior to a 2,015-2,015 tie vote in April, vowed to bring them back to the ballot box. The resolution is the first part of the process, Jordan said.

"This is to see if the council wants to revisit them," he said.

Instructing city staff to work on the road impact fees will require the majority of the council supporting the resolution. Five council members have already voted in favor of road impact fees in the past, shortly before the April election.

The proposed fees would pay for road projects throughout the city. They would be charged on new construction, which some argue necessitates the road improvement. Residential and commercial growth in Fayetteville puts more cars on roads, requiring improved streets.

Proponents claimed during the April election it was only fair to put some of the financial burden on new development.

A cadre of real estate agents, developers and business owners disagreed, fighting publicly against the proposed impact fees. A group, Citizens4Fayetteville, called the proposed fees "double taxation" on business.

Another group, Vote For Fayetteville, banded together to support the fees.

A single absentee vote decided the election by tying the vote. Ballot questions must receive a majority of the votes to pass.

The proposed fees this time might be more palatable to business. Steve Rust, president of the Fayetteville Economic Development Council, said it is possible a deal could happen.

"Exactly what that is, I don't know," Rust said.

Jordan said he also thinks the details are sketchy. He said he is hopeful specifics can be fleshed out if the resolution passes.

Prospective changes to proposed road impact fees include lowering the fee for commercial, office and industrial development, and moving to a graduated residential road impact fee where the charge is based on the size of the house.

"The bigger the house, the more you pay," Jordan explained.

He also said the road impact fees could be wrapped with the off-site improvements Fayetteville requires. Developers must often make extensive improvements to city streets adjoining their projects.

Most of the opposition from the business community was based on the feeling the proposed fees were too high, Jordan said. He noted he is willing to discuss making the fees fairer.

Any road impact fees must balance bringing in money for road expansions and repairs with encouraging development, Rust said.

"The bottom line is we have to pay for road infrastructure some way," he said. "But don't make (the fees) get so high it is bad for business."

Rust said the roads are not an impediment to attracting business.

"Having said that, we need to pay close attention to how we're growing and how we pay for roads," he said.

Jim Bemis, a proponent of the fees who campaigned for them as part of Vote For Fayetteville, said the proposed road impact charge remains crucial.

"I'm glad to see the debate," Bemis said Friday. "We desperately need the infrastructure."

Jordan said further discussions will take place if the resolution passes. The City Council can enact impact fees at its discretion, so another election would not be necessary.

"My preference would be a vote of the council," Jordan said.

If an election is held, Jordan said he'll get out and campaign like last time.

"I'll do what needs to be done," he said.

At A Glance

Total Fees

Five cities in Arkansas collect some type of impact fee. The total each collects, as of Jan. 1, in various impact fees, and the U.S. average for the 274 cities that collect impact fees:

* Bentonville: \$4,750

* Conway: \$1,698

* Fayetteville: \$2,534

* Hot Springs: \$500

* Lowell: \$504

* U.S. average: \$8,980

Source: City Of Fayetteville