



## Impact fees ensure green spaces in new Albuquerque-area developments

Peter Rice/Special to The Tribune  
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During an average spring week in Fort Collins, Colo., 5,000 people are out on the grass playing soccer.

"Fort Collins, I would say, has done a very nice job with parks," said Al Minatta, executive director of the Fort Collins Soccer Club. "We have not had to turn people away. We've been able to find space for everyone."

That's no happy accident. The city of about 130,000 people for decades has put hefty fees on every new building permit and diverted that money to park construction.

It's a system that Albuquerque only fully embraced on July 1, but it promises a brighter future for those looking to kick a ball around or spend time in the open spaces.

Someday.

For now, Duke City taxpayers must face the consequences of not imposing those fees sooner.

The West Side of Albuquerque is Exhibit A. In 1980, it held 12,400 homes. In 1990, 22,500. In 2004, 50,000. Another 10,000 building permits have been issued since then.

Today, thousands of children live in those homes, but playing soccer isn't easy. There just isn't enough grass.

"We're always behind the eight ball," said Dan Mourning, executive director of the New Mexico Paradise Hills Clash Soccer Club.

The grass that does exist is so overbooked that the Young American Football League had to cap the number of teams it fielded at 22. The Clash Soccer Club had to turn away between 50 and 100 kids, Mourning estimated. The children will have to commute to other parts of town or go on a waiting list.

"That's 50 kids too many," Mourning said. "You're trying to develop kids for the game of life."

Back in the 1970s, Fort Collins started charging an impact fee for every bit of new construction. These days, the fee is \$1,921 for every house larger 2,200 square feet. In the mid-1990s, the city added a community park fee, meant to build bigger regional green spaces. That fee now stands at \$2,139.

The money, which varies each year depending on the number of houses built, goes into a fund to build

parks for the people who buy into new neighborhoods.

"By having the system follow growth, we haven't gotten so far behind," said Craig Foreman, Fort Collins' manager of park planning and development. "Everyone has a short drive to a neighborhood park."

Rio Rancho and Bernalillo County brought in the fees in the mid 1990s; in Albuquerque, the system only came into full force on July 1. Anyone looking to take out a building permit for construction on the Northwest Mesa will pay an impact fee of \$1,210 for parks. On the Southwest Mesa, that figure is \$1,610.

That will help new areas, but in parts of town that are already built, citizens are left to wonder how their lives might be different had the fees gone in before the West Side took off.

Some estimates can be made on that front. If all the homes constructed since 1980 on the West Side could be charged a retroactive park impact fee, the city would have about somewhere in the neighborhood of \$65 million right now.

"There would be another regional park already built," said Michael Cadigan, who represents the Northwest Mesa on the City Council. "Probably Ventana Ranch (Park) would already have been built. I think that every neighborhood would have had its own neighborhood park."



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