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Who will pay rising impact fees?

By LE ROY STANDISH The Daily Sentinel

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Who should pay for the upkeep of roads here in the Grand Valley — the residents or the business owners?

The question is yet to be answered, but some are saying businesses are already paying their fair share — if not more than their fair share.

The issue has arisen as part of ongoing discussions within the Grand Valley Regional Transportation Committee. The committee, made up of representatives from Mesa County, Grand Junction, Fruita and the town of Palisade, is debating how much to increase transportation impact fees and to whom they should apply.

“We’re trying to bring in more commercial and retail,” Palisade Town Trustee Mario Coringrato said Monday in defense of his proposal to raise impact fees on residential and not on retail or commercial.

The transportation impact fee is charged to builders when they pull permits. Every municipality in the county charges the same \$1,589 fee for single-family residences and calculates fees for commercial and retail buildings using the same sliding scale.

Other than Palisade Town Administrator Tim Sarmo, no one else at Monday’s Regional Transportation Committee meeting spoke out in favor of Coringrato’s proposal. But Mesa County Commission Chairman Craig Meis, who was not in attendance Monday, sees the issue in a similar light.

“There is no question businesses, from the point of property taxes, pay more,” Meis said. “It’s just all math. Housing is at 7.96 percent assessed valuation, commercial is paying 29 percent assessed valuation ... The transportation impact fee is weighted so that everyone is paying their fair share all together, when in fact they are not.”

The county is undertaking a study to see just how much of each property tax dollar spent goes toward maintaining the current transportation infrastructure.

The issue, unsettled as it is, was set aside during Monday’s meeting and the group focused on issues on which there was consensus. Everyone agreed fees need to increase. Everyone also agreed that the fee should fluctuate based on local construction inflation rate, not the Denver/Boulder Consumer Price Index on which it has been based. The current local inflation rate is 18.75 percent.

The base fee and whether the fee should be the same throughout the county remains in question.

Grand Junction’s representative, Councilwoman Bonnie Beckstein, said the city wanted a base fee of \$4,150 and make adjustments in future years based upon the local inflation rate.

Commissioner Janet Rowland, the county’s representative to the transportation committee, said the fee should be \$2,554 and frozen until a study to look at transportation costs and needs is completed.

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