



## Council hears complaints on impact, parks fees

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By *KEILA SZPALLER of the Missoulian*

A proposed fee for transportation is too high, but one for parks is much too low.

Those are some of the comments the Missoula City Council heard about impact fees Monday during its regular meeting. The city is redoing its impact fees, which are designed to get growth to pay its own way for facilities and equipment. If approved, the transportation fee would be a new cost that would help fund Missoula's growing traffic needs. That and the parks impact fees are part of the package of fees the council will vote on in the future.

Collin Bangs, who served on an impact fee advisory committee, professes to “hate” government fees that increase the cost of housing. But he nonetheless eventually came to reluctantly support the hefty transportation fee, a “necessary evil.” Bangs said he doesn't like the alternative, namely worse gridlock on Missoula's roads.

The Missoula Building Industry Association's Jim Leiter said when fees go up, fewer people are able to afford homes in Missoula. The association wasn't in favor or opposed to the fees, but Leiter said the fees don't help create work force housing.

A council candidate disagreed. Jason Wiener said it isn't fees that are driving up the cost of housing in Missoula. And without the fees, government is actually subsidizing growth. Consultants recommended transportation fees twice as high as the ones currently proposed - and Wiener said that means the proposed fees already amount to a 50 percent subsidy.

Patty Kent, who develops housing for the Western Montana Mental Health Center, said she agreed that fees were a necessary evil. But quality of life in Missoula depends on those fees. If nonprofits such as the center can find a way to pay for the fees, the private sector also should be able to do so, Kent said.

Gary Bakke, with the Missoula Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber opposes the high fees on commercial developments and asked for more research on the impacts of fees.

Several people wanted to see fees for parks reinstated. Currently, they're slated to be cut 55 percent but opponents say that would hurt parks.

Richard Smith said soccer players of all ages need fields in which to play: “Please don't cut that park impact fee.”

Tim Bechtold, chairman of the city parks board, said if the fees are cut, parks will look more like knapweed patches. And he reminded the council of one controversial alternative before them recently: the Pineview Park special impact district. Some people believed park improvements shouldn't be funded by special taxes.

Bechtold also said parks are one of the most important amenities a city has to offer, and not having enough money for them would have severe consequences.

“We're not going to be able to serve the people who need it (parks) most,” Bechtold said.

Under the current structure, most fees are slated to decrease. Adding the transportation fee bumps up the bottom line by

a lot, however. At the same time, the proposed fee is much less than similar fees in other Montana cities.

City officials argue the fees are sorely needed.

“The growth impacts our systems,” said Chief Administrative Officer Bruce Bender.

In other business, the council unanimously approved a rename and special zoning district for the Ranch Club, formerly a part of Phantom Hills. Several neighbors spoke in favor of plans for the “resort-style” community.

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