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Council reinstates city's development impact fees

Published on Wed, Mar 19, 2014 by **Brandy Kiger Shreve**

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Visions of growth and development are spurring Blaine city officials to begin looking at codes, ordinances and fees to see where changes might be appropriate.

In a move to buffer the city's planned street and park projects with a little cash in the reserve, Blaine City Council members considered reinstating a dormant development impact fee that would ease its growing pains.

The collection of development impact fees was discontinued in 2009, in hopes that it would promote development as the economy continued to head south, but since then the impact fee reserve balances for both the parks and streets funds have become depleted with no steady stream of revenue to bolster them. "Our balances have dwindled to nearly zero since then," said public works director Ravyn Whitewolf. "The funds were used for what they were designed for, but they're now gone. Without those impact fees, the projects that we have lined up can't proceed."

Whitewolf noted that even though the city pursues grants for many of its projects to offset the cost to citizens, most grants that the city receives for capital improvements such as street repairs require a matching contribution from the city. "Even some of the projects we have in the works are short, even though they have grant funds available," she said.

Whitewolf said the city's State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) fee, which is only applied to projects that meet certain thresholds, is not a reliable source of income for these projects. "There's no level of predictability going into a relationship with developer with SEPA fees," she said. "We have nothing on the plate to offer them. Having that impact fee offers more certainty ahead of time and moves the process along faster, because there are fee formulas that exist."

The city of Blaine receives revenue for the street fund through property taxes, a gas tax, motor vehicle fuel taxes and transfers from the general fund.

After a public hearing at the regular March 11 city council meeting, councilmembers voted 6-1 to reinstate the development impact fees, with Bonnie Onyon opposed.

The impact fee will be imposed upon all new development within the city and will be calculated when the building permit application is filed.

At the same meeting, Blaine police chief Mike Haslip introduced a series of amendments to the Blaine Municipal Code that updated the document's language to reflect situations the police department works in on a regular basis.

"Some of these, as they were written, were very difficult to enforce," Haslip said. "There's been a patchwork developed over many years."

The changes to the ordinance give more leeway to those who might find themselves in need of a bathroom, but with no facilities in sight, opt to urinate in public. "Before that would have been charged as a 'lewd act'," Haslip said, "which carries a stigma and will follow you. The new ordinance allows us to charge simply for urinating in public, which is different."

Those who choose to do their business in public can still be charged a fine of up to \$500, Haslip said.

Other amendments to the municipal code include guidelines for the disposal and display of animal carcasses, including those you happen to bump into on the roadway, updates to the criminal justice non-discrimination policy and revisions to the city's laws regarding marijuana usage.