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A changed council gets busy

The Raleigh council addresses a variety of hot-button issues, including impact fees

DAVID BRACKEN, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - A revamped Raleigh City Council met for the first time Tuesday and vowed to quickly address growth and tax issues raised by voters during this fall's campaign.

After welcoming new members Nancy McFarlane, Rodger Koopman and Mary-Ann Baldwin, Mayor Charles Meeker placed a number of hot-button issues on the council's agenda.

At the top of that list is impact fees, which Raleigh imposes on new housing and uses to pay for roads and parks. Last week, Meeker said he would press the new council to more than double Raleigh's impact fees from \$1,200 to \$2,500 per house.

On Tuesday, the mayor asked City Attorney Tom McCormick whether Raleigh needed to collect new data on its current impact fees before voting on an increase. The last major study of Raleigh's impact fee structure occurred in 2006, when a Texas consultant concluded that the fees had not kept pace with increases in the cost of land and construction.

McCormick advised the council to have city staff study Raleigh's existing fees, as well as the legality of tying the fees to the size of a house, with larger fees for larger homes.

Meeker and Koopman both said they hoped such a study could be concluded quickly.

"I don't think we need much more discussion about this," Koopman said.

Meeker also presented a resolution on the city's use of tax increment financing.

The resolution, which will be discussed at the council's Jan. 8 meeting, states that the city should only use the financing tool to improve blighted or economically depressed areas.

Meeker's resolution is a response to developer John Kane, who approached the previous council about using tax increment financing for his North Hills East project. Meeker opposes assisting Kane's project, as did Koopman and McFarlane during the campaign.

The council referred a number of issues to various subcommittees, including the location of a proposed senior center and the future development of Horseshoe Farm Park and Durant Nature Park.

A proposal about how to regulate infill development and the practice of tearing down homes in established neighborhoods and replacing them with much larger homes was referred to the city's Planning Commission. It will be reviewed at the commission's meeting next week and then appear on the City Council's Jan. 8 agenda.

david.bracken@newsobserver.com or (919) 829-4548

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