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Impact fee increase decision postponed again

BY BETH HATCHER, STAFF WRITER

A decision about raising impact fees was again delayed as Cary Town Council members postponed action on the matter until April 7.

The decision came at the council's meeting Thursday, at which Budget Director Scott Fogleman presented a staff report on impact fee increases that included the following recommendations:

- Set base zone transportation, water, potable irrigation meter fees and sewer development fees at 75 percent of their maximum levels effective July 1.
- Set reclaimed water irrigation meter fee at 50 percent of the recommended potable fees effective July 1.
- Employ annual increases of 3 percent to transportation, potable irrigation meter fees, reclaimed water irrigation meter fees and sewer development fees anticipated as part of each year's annual budget process beginning with fiscal year 2010.

A public hearing followed Fogleman's presentation in which people spoke for and against the possible increases.

Several people from the building community asked the council not to raise the fees, saying that especially in this time of recession increased fees could severely slow growth in Cary and even push a slow down to other municipalities.

"I build where I think the demand will be," said local builder Mark Massengill.

Development fees are one-time charges on new development that are used to fund a proportional share of the costs of capital infrastructure necessary to serve the development. The Town of Cary uses three types of development fees: transportation, sewer, and water, which would include irrigation meter fees, according to staff reports.

Local resident Larry Ballas gave the other side of the argument when he told council that their first priority should be not to ensure that builders make more profits, but to do what is right for citizens.

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Finding the balance between protecting residents' quality of life without choking the business community has kept the council studying the issue. But council member Erv Portman said he was ready for a decision to be made.

Council consensus is that the fees need to be raised, Mayor Harold Weinbrecht said. How much is the question.

During the discussion Weinbrecht alluded to the last time impact fees were raised in Cary. The increase — carried out during the Glen Lang administration — was so dramatic that it did halt growth, he said.

It's a situation Weinbrecht doesn't want to see repeated.

"We reached out too hard. ... We went beyond what our neighbors were doing," Weinbrecht said.

He said he would like to see more of a balance in this delicate economy.

Council is set to consider, and could vote on the fees at its April 7 meeting.

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