

Star-Telegram

Arlington panel wants impact fees unchanged as it studies incentives

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ARLINGTON -- After months of study, a City Council committee on Tuesday recommended that Arlington's impact fees stay unchanged while it continues to explore possible incentives, such as rebates or fee reductions, aimed at making the city a more financially attractive place to build.

Council members said that they favor a "modest increase" in impact fees, which haven't changed since 2003, but that they first want to assess how all of the fees developers pay compare with other cities'.

Last week, a group of developers told council members that many already consider Arlington an expensive place to do business and that the city's building, inspection and permit-related fees could be deal-breakers when the economy begins picking up.

Arlington is two years behind in its review of its impact fees, which the city charges developers to help pay for the roads, sewer lines and water lines needed to support their projects.

"Hopefully we don't have to increase fees. I would like to see us fix it where it is financially fair to developers and they have a reason to do business in Arlington," said Councilman Mel LeBlanc, who proposed delaying any impact fee increase until the economy has improved.

Council warned

Arlington's impact fee rates fall below those of many other area cities, including Fort Worth, Grand Prairie and Mansfield, officials have said. Arlington charges 38 percent less in water fees, 67 percent less in wastewater fees and 41 percent less in road fees than the maximum under state law.

Jim Parajon, the city's community development and planning director, warned the council that someone, whether it be the developers or the taxpayers, will have to pay for the nearly \$300 million in roadway, water and wastewater capital improvement projects expected to serve Arlington's growing population over the next decade.

But Councilman Robert Shepard said he believes that it's the city's job to provide water, sewer and streets, not the developer's.

"I've said for years, the city ought to stop developing in areas where there isn't adequate infrastructure," said Shepard, a former Planning and Zoning Commission member.

The committee is considering credits or refunds to help offset impact fees to encourage certain types of projects, such as mixed-use developments in downtown.

During an impact fee discussion meeting last week, Sue Blankenship of Huffines Communities told the council that her company paid more than \$100,000 in fees to place a \$50,000 manufactured home on its construction site at the future Viridian master-planned community in far north Arlington.

City staff said that Huffines Communities paid roughly \$9,000 to install the manufactured home and that the rest of the fees paid were related to Viridian's 800-acre first phase of home development.

This report includes material from the *Star-Telegram* archives.

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