

# Blaine planning commission supports park impact fees

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Blaine planning commissioners want park impact fees reinstated citywide and have recommended city council set the fees higher than they were in 2009, before being dropped.

The move is the second effort on the city's part to raise more revenue by reinstating dormant fees. In April, Blaine City Council voted to reinstate water and sewer connection fees, which has drawn the ire of a few high-profile developers in the city.

At their June 28 meeting, planning commissioners supported the recommendation 5-1, with commissioner Sue Sturgill opposed, to reinstate park impact fees at \$1,200 per home or duplex for new residential development. Commissioners also supported creating a park impact fee for commercial development, though city planning staff will have to figure out how such a fee might be implemented.

Blaine community development director Michael Jones said implementing a commercial park impact fee would mean starting from scratch since the city doesn't have an established process for such a fee. While residential park impact fees are based on the number of homes or duplexes, similar charges for commercial development could be based on several factors, including square footage and number of employees.

“There are quite a few things to be evaluated and considered,” Jones said.

From 1998 to 2009, park impact fees were charged on new homes, duplexes or other residential units built in the city. The fees were meant to pay for new parks needed as the city's population increased.

Blaine brought in slightly more than \$250,000 in park impact fees from 1998 to 2009. City staff figure the fees either fully or partially funded 11 park projects during that time, including the H and G street plazas and the Dakota Creek kayak launch.

Council voted to eliminate park impact fees in late 2009 in the hopes it would spur development downtown. Council members also abolished water and sewer connection fees around the same time.

Commissioners initially met to discuss amending the city's comprehensive plan to either reinstate the fees at a reduced rate for substantial residential development or charge different fees for different parts of the city. Commissioners eventually decided that instituting a flat rate across the board would be the best route, agreeing with a recommendation from the city's park and cemetery board.

Planning commissioner Richard May said he did not see how discounts in impact fees for larger scale developments downtown would trickle down to other Blaine residents. He said he was in favor of simply “turning park impact fees back on.”

