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BRADENTONHERALD.COM

Wednesday, Mar 11, 2009

Posted on Tue, Mar. 10, 2009

Bradenton may suspend impact fees

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BRADENTON — In an effort to spur business during the economic slump that has smacked the area, the City Council will vote on suspending impact fees for parks and recreation and public safety.

The proposed impact fee ordinances, which will be presented to the council at the 8:30 a.m. Wednesday meeting, reflect the economic climate and the decline of construction in the area.

"We talked about things that would make it easier to get projects going in the city," said Councilwoman Marianne Barnebey, referring to the earlier council work session where the issue was first discussed.

Barnebey said in a telephone interview Monday she wanted to hear what the public has to say about the suspension of impact fees.

"This is one of those things that could be a blessing or a curse," she said.

City or other governing agencies, such as the county, charge impact fees on new construction to pay for the effect of the projected increased use of public services, such as parks and police, the development will have on the community.

Councilman Harold Byrd said he and the other council members need to do their homework on this issue before making a decision.

"I think we need to look at whether it's best to suspend them totally across the board, or just defer them," Byrd said. "We have to look at what kind of impact these decisions will have."

Like several council members, Byrd said he understands there is a need to spur the economy.

"But at the same time we don't want to shoot ourselves in the foot," he said, "and (need to) make sure we can live with the economic impact as related to those decisions."

Councilman Gene Gallo said he would support the ordinances if they were calibrated on the stages of the progress of projects under development.

"As they get their CO (certificate of occupancy) the city will get the impact fees for that unit," Gallo said. "If that in fact is what we're dealing with, then I have no problem."

"If it's going to do away with them, then that's another issue," he said.

For Councilman Bemis Smith the question should be whether the city should be charging impact fees at all.

Since most urban areas, such as Bradenton, are mostly built-out and not many large developments are having much impact on the public services, Smith said the council should look at whether the fees are necessary.

"The population of the city over the last two years is down 600 to a 1,000," he said, "and since impact fees are for new growth, what's the impact for new growth with less people?"

Smith, a homebuilder by profession, said the city should take steps to encourage people to move into the city.

"We need to create the impetus to get things going around here," he said. "We need to get government out of the way to make it more conducive for new development."

Barnebey agreed saying, "It is incumbent upon government to do whatever it can to spur development and not put speed bumps in the way."

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