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City impact fee would offset costs

By Brian D. Bridgeford / News Republic

State law allows Baraboo to recoup part of the cost of a new police, fire and ambulance station by charging an impact fee of about \$2,630 to new residences constructed in the city, a financial advisor reported Tuesday.

James A. Mann of Brookfield-based Ehlers and Associates financial advisors spoke before the Baraboo City Council. Last summer council members had asked his firm to study the use of impact fees charged to new development as a means to help build space for the city's emergency service agencies.

State law defines how much a city can charge in impact fees for costs associated with growth in the community, he said.

"You can't just create an impact fee on growth and development for unspecified uses or without some relationship that the growth and development is actually causing the need for a capital expenditure going forward," Mann said. "Impact fees can be levied on any new development that is within the jurisdiction of the political subdivision that is implementing the fees."

A space needs study calculated the Baraboo Police Department should nearly triple its current office space to about 37,000 square feet, he said. The Fire Department needs about 42,200 square feet and is now operating out of 10,850 square feet of space. The Baraboo emergency medical service is calculated to need about 27,000 square feet for its operations and now makes due with about 4,600 square feet, Mann said.

State law specifically allows cities to levy an impact fee for emergency services facilities, as well as many other municipal projects, he said. The law specifically forbids using an impact fee to build a new city hall.

Mann pointed to a \$17.9-million option to build the emergency services facility on land next to the Baraboo Municipal Building along Ash and Fifth streets. He calculated the city could attribute about \$5.5 million of the cost to new development and pay off that amount by collecting impact fees over a period of years. Because the Fire Department and Baraboo ambulance operate outside of the city, state law would allow charging an impact fee in rural areas to help cover their part of the new facility, Mann said. However, neighboring communities served by the fire and ambulance districts would have to approve their own impact fee ordinance to raise that money.

"We came up with a net impact fee for the Police Department of \$965, for the Fire Department at \$870 and the ambulance service at \$795, for a gross fee of \$2,630," he said, "and that is what is proposed at this point,"

The impact fee is charged once to owners of new residences and is their "buy in" to city facilities that have already been built, Mann said. For example, the city already charges a sewer connection fee for new residences that helps cover the cost of the wastewater treatment plant.

Mayor Patrick Liston noted the city also charges impact fees that support the parks and library.

During a public hearing on the issue Baraboo resident Mary Klingenmeyer spoke in support of an impact fee to build an emergency services building. She is the clerk for the village of West Baraboo, but said she spoke only on her own behalf.

"As a city resident I am in favor of the impact fee," she said. "There's no question that the emergency services need new facilities.

"I was born and raised here and would like to see a beautiful facility for our emergency services," Klingenmeyer said.

Mayor Liston said citizens wanting to comment on the impact fee proposal have two weeks until the next City Council meeting to respond.

They may write Liston c/o 135 Fourth St., Baraboo, WI 53913, or contact himself, Clerk Cheryl Giese or Administrator Edward Geick via their e-mail addresses available on the city Web site.

Liston invited comments at his e-mail address — pliston@cityofbaraboo.com

Information about the city of Baraboo, including contact numbers for city officials and departments, city ordinances, ward maps and meeting agendas may be found online — <http://www.cityofbaraboo.com>.

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Send e-mail to bbridgeford@capitalnewspapers.com