

Council mulls impact fee options

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By CAMERON RASMUSSEN Staff writer |

SANDPOINT — Before restructuring the impact fee system, the City Council spent Wednesday’s meeting getting some expert advise on the subject.

Impact fee expert Carson Bise outlined the various approaches that the city officials can take when retooling the system to better suit Sandpoint’s comprehensive growth plan.

“The most important thing is to pay particular attention to the fiscal realities of Sandpoint,” Bise said.

According to Bise, impact fees are a well-rounded solution to maintaining public infrastructure by connecting the private sector into the process. A good system that ensures equitable fee distribution could help promote a level playing field for all residents and businesses. He emphasized that fee payers should see real benefits from their contributions and cautioned that impact fees should be used to meet community needs rather than raise revenue.

“Some people see impact fees as the solution for all their financial problems, but that’s never the case,” he said. “You have to show people that impact fees are not a revenue-raising mechanism.”

Bise demonstrated three different methodologies characterized by their relationship to time. Cost recovery looks to the past by observing actual maintenance requirements. Incremental expansion focuses on the present by using a formula-based approach to expansion. Finally, the plan-based methodology, a common strategy for utilities, structures fees around projected improvements.

At the end of his presentation, Bise outlined misconceptions to avoid during system planning. He cautioned that fees usually can’t cover the entire cost of new facilities and that nonresidential fees can’t be easily adjusted in an economic pinch. On the flip side, developers usually don’t hate impact fees and rarely move to adjacent communities or halt low and moderate income development because of them.

Council members said that the presentation was extremely helpful in preparing them for the task at hand.

“I’m really looking forward to going through this process,” Councilman Stephen Snedden said. “The philosophy that you’ve outlined here is so much better than our current plan that I’m really excited to see what becomes of it.”

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