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## Council postpones water connection raise

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— Proposed fees would be for new construction

By Carol L. Cole

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Norman city councilmembers voted 8-0 to postpone a vote on increasing water connection fees for new construction per living unit until April 10 --but not until after a lively debate at their regular Tuesday meeting. The postponement would allow discussion at an upcoming Community Dialogue on March 29 and a televised council study session April 3. Developers and builders said they also would like to meet with the city to work on ways that they could do part of the work to defray fees.

The water connection fees have not been increased since Aug. 1, 1986.

"This is just a smokescreen for further delay," said Ward 4 councilmember and mayor-elect Cindy Rosenthal.

"The fact of the matter is, is you can look at impact fees in other communities in other states and the way that you get to an amount that development pays for its share of growth costs, is in an incremental process."

She said in many other states, impact fees are quadruple or even up to 10 times as much as Norman charges. The proposal was to increase fees from \$525 to \$850 for connection of a 3/4-inch line, with fees increasing as the water meter and line size goes up. The fee is split between the city's water and wastewater funds.

Earlier, in a conference before the meeting, Rosenthal said the proposal was clearly linked to new capacity because of growth. She said it was in keeping with the shared responsibility with ratepayers and recommended by the city's finance committee.

"Our voters a year ago approved a substantial rate increase with the understanding that this was coming forward," Rosenthal said of a water rate increase passed in March 2006.

Council started discussions about increasing the fees in August 2005. Developers and builders previously argued that Norman's fees are higher for new construction when building permits and other costs are factored in.

"We're higher than some, lower than some," said Ken Komiske, director of utilities. "We're in the mix."

Ward 2 councilmember Richard Stawicki said he had "enough cobwebs in my brain, I think I need a whole study session," and said he would support the postponement to refresh his memory from 18 months ago.

Sean Rieger, a representative of the Norman Developers Association, said the increase in fees would be borne by Norman home buyers and cost other businesses where the new home buyer would not spend money.

"In any business model, it's obvious that the end consumer will pay it," Rieger said.

Harold Heiple, attorney for the Norman Developers Council, asked that the city consider analysis of all of its fees. A comparison of fees between Norman, Oklahoma City, Moore, Edmond, Mustang Noble, Denton, Texas, and Lawrence, Kan., shows Norman is high, but is not the highest, even with a wastewater excise fee not charged by any other of those cities.

For water connection fees on a 2,400-square-foot home with a 600-foot garage, Lawrence charges \$1,300, with Edmond charging \$1,106; Mustang, \$390; and Oklahoma City, \$100.

Norman charges several other fees, as do the other cities.

The city of Norman does not charge a water impact fee, but several of the surveyed cities do, including: Denton, Texas, \$3,155; Noble, \$500; and Mustang, \$150.

And on water meter fees Norman charges \$250; Edmond, \$542; Lawrence, Kan., \$435; Noble, \$400; Denton, Texas, \$305; Moore, \$225; Mustang, \$170; and Oklahoma City, \$67.

Norman also does not charge a wastewater treatment fee. In Denton, Texas, the fee is \$1,437; Moore, \$700;

and Oklahoma City, \$100.

All cities but Denton charge a sewer connection fee, including Lawrence, Kan., \$1,040; Edmond, \$1,027; Noble, \$480; Norman, \$275; Mustang, \$200; Oklahoma City, \$100; and Moore, \$50.

On building permits for a 2,400-square-foot house, charges are: Lawrence, Kan., \$1,344; Denton, Texas, \$545; Norman and Oklahoma City, \$420; Noble, \$308; Moore, \$210; and Edmond, \$55.

Subcontractor contracts include charges from Mustang of \$418; Moore, \$400; Oklahoma City, \$317; Edmond, \$252; Noble, \$160; Norman, \$135; and Denton, Texas, \$15. Lawrence does not charge a subcontractor fee.

Norman voters previously approved wastewater excise fees, which would be \$3,250 on a 2,400-square-foot home and \$850 on a 1,200-square-foot home.

In other business, council:

Denied by a 4-4 vote an encroachment at 4217 Middlefield Court on a city of Norman utility easement for a portion of driveway and installation of a retaining wall. Councilmembers Stawicki, Jim Stanley, David Hopper and Rachel Butler cast "nay" votes, with councilmembers Bob Thompson, Rosenthal, Dan Quinn and Mayor Harold Haralson voting in favor.

Approved an encroachment at 1933 Aladdin Court into a utility easement by a 8-0 vote, with the 1965-built house encroaching about two feet into the easement.

Denied by a 4-4 vote an encroachment at 4201 Northhampton Court into a city of Norman utility easement for a brick column and wood fence, a concrete driveway extension and a concrete extension for pool equipment.

Councilmembers Stawicki, Jim Stanley, David Hopper and Rachel Butler cast "nay" votes, with councilmembers Bob Thompson, Rosenthal, Dan Quinn and Mayor Harold Haralson voting in favor.

Approved an encroachment by a 6-2 vote at 2609 Fairfield Drive into a city of Norman utility easement for a brick column and iron fence. Voting "nay" were councilmembers Stawicki and Hopper.

Approved an ordinance 8-0 requesting closure of a portion of a public utility easement south and west of the intersection of SH 9 and Classen Boulevard.

Ward 7 councilmember Doug Cubberley was absent so that he could attend his daughter's All-City Concert.

All items on the consent agenda were approved.

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