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County considering road-impact fee

New charge would be phased-in; officials want it similar to city's

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La Plata County is considering implementing a road-impact fee similar to that being charged by the city of Durango.

The City Council in August voted to increase the fee imposed on new development to help cover the cost of road improvements made necessary by growth.

During a work session Wednesday, county officials agreed on the importance of charging a fee comparable to the city's so that developers don't flock to unincorporated areas to avoid paying higher city fees.

Currently, the county has worked out agreements with specific developers to collect fees - as was the case with Three Springs and Durango Mountain Resort - but there is no countywide road-impact fee.

"It's an inequitable situation right now," County Manager Shawn Nau said.

The fee the county is considering charging would be phased in over two years and, by 2011, would vary from \$3,954 to \$5,110 for a single-family home, depending on the square footage of the dwelling. It would be imposed only on new development.

The county hired consulting firm Duncan Associates, which specializes in impact-fee studies, to formulate a fee structure that takes into account future road needs.

The study yielded a higher recommended fee, but officials were looking at charging only a percentage of that to keep the fee in line with the city's fee.

Commissioner Kellie Hotter said the new fee could be hard for developers to swallow given the sluggish real estate market.

"I think we need to proceed mindful of the current economic situation," she said.

Officials now plan to present the impact-fee plan to builders and other interested parties in the public before taking it up for a vote.

Finance Director Karla Distel noted that the county will have to be prepared to pay for existing road deficiencies, which by law the fee can not cover, as it begins collecting the fee for growth-related improvements.

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