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## County moves forward with development fee

Thadeus Greenson/The Times-Standard

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The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to take the next step toward imposing a development impact mitigation fee to support Humboldt Fire District No. 1.

The district has long looked to have such a fee imposed to help cover the costs of the new facilities, equipment and capital improvements associated with serving newly developed areas, but had put the brakes on the process because the county was looking at implementing a “global” development impact fee that would impose the fees for a variety of purposes.

Tuesday, the board gave Humboldt Fire District No. 1 the go-ahead to move forward, deciding in essence that it's not worth waiting for the county.

“In a perfect world, I think the best idea would be to have one development impact fee,” said County Administrative Officer Loretta Nickolaus. “Unfortunately, we are lagging. We are just not able to move that quickly.”

County Public Works Director Tom Mattson said the county had been working toward implementing the impact fees globally, but that the economic recession, and the corresponding rush to find shovel-ready projects for stimulus funds, took almost all his department's attention.

“The idea was if we all move forward together there is a cost savings to all of us,” Mattson said. “But, we are well behind their timeline.”

In Tuesday's vote, the board also took the first step toward creating an “enabling ordinance” that will allow other fire protection districts to move toward adopting development impact fees.

Tuesday's action clears the way for Humboldt Fire District No. 1 and county staff to work toward filling out all the paperwork and going through the various processes to implement the fee, which include California Environmental Quality Act documentation. Fourth District Supervisor Bonnie Neely said she wanted to make sure it was the fire district, and not the county, that bore the costs associated with implementing the development fee, and the rest of the board agreed.

Last year, fire officials calculated that the development fees would raise about 45 percent of the money needed to build a new station in Cutten. The rest would come from setting aside a portion of operation fees and borrowing.

John McFarland, chief of the Arcata Fire Protection District and president of the Humboldt County Fire Chiefs Association, urged the board to move forward with the development impact fees, which he said are being utilized throughout the state. Failure to do so, McFarland said, would leave fire districts at the risk of being “depleted” by new developments.

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"I urge you to support it in the name of all 42 agencies in the county," McFarland said.

County Counsel Wendy Chaitin said a lot of work remains before the development impact mitigation fee can be implemented.

"Realistically, we could have something in place by the start of the next fiscal year," she said.

Thadeus Greenson can be reached at 441-0509 or [tgreenson@times-standard.com](mailto:tgreenson@times-standard.com)

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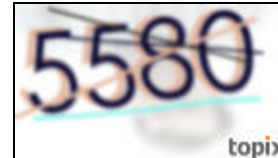
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