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Coupeville may end park impact fee

By Elisabeth Murray
Staff Reporter

Before hammer can hit nail and drill can bite into wood, a fee to mitigate the impact of new home construction on parks, recreation and open space in Coupeville must be paid to Town Hall.

But the impact fee may soon be suspended or dropped as the town updates the parks and recreation element of its comprehensive plan.

Town planner Larry Kwasick is in the process of determining if the town has enough parks, open space, and trails for Coupeville's 1,800 residents. Kwasick will compare the town's current acreage with the goals set in the town's comprehensive plan.

According to the town website, there are currently 28.13 acres of parks in the town. This includes mini-parks, neighborhood and community parks and open space.

"The town can only have (impact fees) if there is an unmet level of service," Mayor Nancy Conard said.

The fee — \$870 for each new single-family home — goes into a parks fund that pays for purchase of parkland and the cost of park improvements.

The town began collecting the fee in 2001 on all new homes built within town limits. As of June 30, the park fund cash balance totaled \$58,160.

Money generated by the fee was used for the Broadway Trail, a gravel walkway along a portion of Broadway between Hwy. 20 and Madrona Way. It could also help pay for installation of a new viewing deck on Front Street in the two undeveloped lots between Toby's Tavern and the Knead & Feed on Front Street — land that was donated to the town after being purchased by people who wanted to preserve it as open space.

The town has yet to get estimates for installation of the deck, but Conard said the money in the park impact fund probably would not be enough to pay for the whole project.

The town did make one mistake in using park impact fee revenue for a project — installation of a sidewalk on the south side of Coveland between Main and Grace streets — that the state Auditor's Office later said did not qualify as a park.

The town was required to refund the fee, plus interest, to the 14 property owners whose money had been used for the project. If all the property owners claim their cash, the refund will add up to \$13,538.

Conard said Coupeville has been able to acquire property for parks without having to dip into the park fund. For example, 17 acres of open space at Krueger Farm were donated to the town by the Friends of Krueger Farm.

Councilwoman Molly Hughes said she believes that in the interest of fairness to the people who have paid into the fund, the park impact fee should continue to be collected.

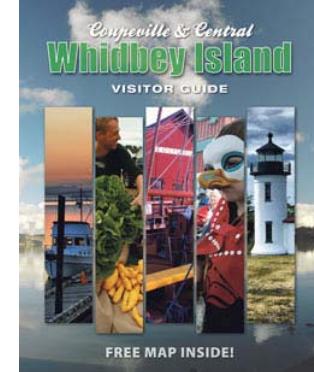
The town may want to increase its park offerings or make improvements to existing parks, Hughes said, and will need money to pay for it.

But adding more parks or infrastructure means the town will have to foot the bill for increased maintenance, Conard said, as the park fund cannot be used for maintenance and repairs.

In 1999, the town surveyed the community's views on parks through a questionnaire mailed to residents.

Conard recommended asking the community to weigh in again on what they want in their parks, and how much they are willing to spend to care for them.

Before seeking public input, the proposal to suspend or eliminate the park impact fee will first be considered by the town's Parks and Recreation Commission.



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