

The Whidbey Examiner

News from the Heart of Whidbey Island

Thursday, December 22, 2011

Coupeville refunds park fees

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More than a year after a state auditor told the Town of Coupeville to refund park impact fees that it had improperly spent on installing a sidewalk, 14 property owners got their fee money back – plus interest.

The town will refund a total of \$13,538. A letter was sent to each property owner last week, and they have until Dec. 13, 2012, to claim their cash.

The town had used park impact-fee money to install a sidewalk along Coveland Street. But after a state auditor determined the project didn't meet state criteria as a park project the town was ordered to return the money. Meanwhile the deadline to spend the park-fee revenue had passed.

In determining the interest due to each property owner, the town used the monthly interest rate it receives on its investments. That's why it took a whole year to determine how much to refund to each property owner, Mayor Nancy Conard said.

"Frankly, it was on the back burner until we had a chance to look at each one," she said.

The town has been collecting impact fees since 2001, setting the money aside to use for larger projects, such as the installation three years ago of the gravel trail along a portion of Broadway Street.

Under state law, the revenue must be spent within six years of collection. But by the time the town was informed that it shouldn't have spend the money on the sidewalk project, that time period had passed.

Before using park money for the Broadway Trail project, Conard had requested and received a letter from the auditor's office indicating that it was an appropriate use of those funds and had cleared it with the town's attorney. If the sidewalk project had been allowed by the auditor, the park money would have been used within the time limit required by the state.

Some of the other projects for which town officials are considering using park impact fees include improvements at the Community Green behind the Coupeville library and the public deck on Front Street between Toby's and Knead and Feed.

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