

Coupeville refunds park impact fees

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Several Coupeville property owners received an unexpected gift courtesy of the town.

Coupeville is refunding \$13,000 in total park impact fees to 14 property owners.

The refund stems from a situation concerning a quarter-block-long stretch of sidewalk on Coveland Street that was installed in 2008. After consulting with the Washington State Auditor's Office, town officials decided to use park impact fee proceeds to pay for the new sidewalk, said Mayor Nancy Conard.

The town had previously used park impact fees to pay for a gravel trail on Broadway.

However, the auditor's office changed its mind after a citizen complaint noted that the town used park impact fees for a hard sidewalk, rather than trail. During the town's latest state audit, the auditor recommended refunding the park impact fee dollars.

Coupeville collects \$870 in park impact fees for every single family residence constructed in town. That money helps pay for capital projects to improve parks and trails throughout the historic town. The town has six years to spend the money or it has to be refunded, plus interest to the property owner.

Because it had been more than six years since the town collected fees from the properties in question, it had to give the money back.

The affected property owners received certified letters last month and they have one year to claim their refund. The property owners will generally receive between \$1,028 and \$1,045. Conard said the one exception is for \$2,674 because of construction of a four-plex.

Conard said the town could have argued against the auditor's office recommendation, but the legal fees likely could have accounted for more than the amount of money it had to refund.

The town has amassed \$75,549 in its park impact fee fund, according to its 2012 operating budget. Officials are planing to bring in an additional \$1,940 in 2012, which will up the fund up to \$77,489. The fund has expanded in recent years because of the construction of several significant housing projects, notably Lauren's Woods.

Conard said the town is saving the money to help fund several projects at the community green behind the Coupeville Public Library and a new public deck on Front Street next to Toby's Tavern.

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