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Planners say Sycamore needs higher impact fees

By Renee Messacar - Staff Writer

SYCAMORE - Impact fees on new homes aren't high enough to cover the costs of expanding Sycamore's park and school facilities to serve a growing population, according to the city's plan commission.

It decided in an 8-1 vote Monday night to forward a suggestion to the city council to increase the fees by 11 percent.

Impact fees are determined by a formula that considers the assumed value of land the homes are built on, the number of people likely to live in the homes and other factors.

Plan Commission member Ken George was the only one to vote against the increases. Member Bill Davey was not present.

Discussions about the increases started a couple months ago during meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee on Growth Management, in which representatives of local organizations and taxing bodies try to come up with solutions to an \$8.5 million deficit a Northern Illinois University study said the school district could face in 10 years. The group decided the fees should be higher to better match the rising value of land.

City Manager Bill Nicklas said Monday that the school district fee increase would keep pace with the likely bonding and interest costs the school district will pay for building the elementary school it intends to open in 2008.

Nicklas said the plan commission and city council could reconsider impact fees each year.

The DeKalb County Building and Development Association, even though it has a representative on the ad hoc committee who attended several meetings that discussed the fee increases, asked the plan commission to postpone a decision.

Ken Andersen, DCBDA vice president and former Sycamore Park District board treasurer, said he was speaking for the association when he asked for more time to "consider how this would affect economic vitality."

Then, speaking for himself, Andersen said he didn't understand why the park district would need another fee increase after receiving one in February, when the council decided the park district would use the same assumed value of land, \$110,000 an acre, that the school district did. The park district previously used \$75,000 an acre in its formula for determining fees.

The increase in February was to get it line with school district fees, said Larry Steczo, plan commission member and park board president.

"An acre of land is an acre of land," he said. "It's as important to us as it is to the school district."

Andersen said he wanted to see audits of the school and park districts' budgets to

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know whether they warrant these increases.

"We may have to change the signs on the edge of town to say, 'Life costs more in Sycamore'," he said.

Nicklas said the districts, by law, couldn't collect impact fees unless they have a need for them.

"Impact fees are not enough," Plan Commission Member Dave Shipley said. He said a new elementary school could cost \$9 million and new residents should pay their share of that.

He added that the district's budget is public if Andersen wanted to see it.

The fee increases would mean the developer of a new single-family, three-bedroom house would pay \$3,269 instead of \$2,947 to the school district and \$1,015 instead of \$913 to the park district.

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