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Developer fees go up in San Carlos

By **Shaun Bishop**
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Developers looking to build in San Carlos will have to pay higher fees to fund several major traffic improvement projects under a fee hike approved Monday by the city council.

Council members voted 4-0 to increase the city's traffic impact fees by 9 percent in an effort to keep up with the rising cost of three congestion-relief projects, which are now expected to cost a combined \$5.2 million.

The city established the traffic fees last fall to ensure developers were helping to offset the traffic impacts of their projects by paying for upgrades to the city's busiest intersections.

The largest of the trio of projects slated to be funded by fee money is a set of improvements to Holly Street and Highway 101, a plan currently projected to cost \$3.9 million. Those changes include reconfiguring off-ramps and installing new traffic signals. The city also plans to widen Holly Street at Industrial Road at a cost of \$600,000 and add a dedicated left turn lane to Brittan Avenue at Industrial at a cost of \$678,000.

While the Brittan improvements are in the design phase, the city is still studying whether its current plans are the best way to improve Holly Street. Officials recently held a meeting to ask residents for other ideas to reduce gridlock on the busy road.



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The combined cost of the three projects has increased from an estimate of \$4.4 million last August to \$5.2 million this month, mostly because updated designs include new

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project costs, Public Works Director Robert Weil said.

Those projects are supposed to be entirely funded by the traffic fees charged to developers, so the city has to make sure to adjust the fees if costs change, Weil said. The city plans to use redevelopment funds to get the projects going, then repay those funds when development fees are collected.

"If you don't keep on top of the cost, then the city ends up having to subsidize the projects," Weil said.

The fee amounts vary according to the type of project. Under the fee hike, a retail project would be charged a traffic impact fee of \$4,920 per 1,000 square feet, up from an earlier charge of \$4,519. A new apartment complex would be hit with an \$813 fee for each dwelling unit, an increase of \$66 per unit.

The highest traffic fees are for restaurants, which will have to pay \$14,327 per 1,000 square feet, up from \$13,159.

So far, only one developer has had to pay the traffic fee — a developer who received approval to add a mezzanine space inside a building at 931 Terminal Way, Planning Manager Deborah Nelson said.

Weil said the potential for extra fees to discourage development is "always a consideration" for the city, though he noted no one spoke against the 9 percent fee increase on Monday.

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