

July 17, 2013

Salem to review impact fees

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SALEM — Selectmen authorized hiring a consultant to review the town's impact fees, but only after they were told it should have been done several years ago.

The board unanimously agreed Monday to pay consultant Bruce Mayberry \$11,500 to review the impact fee structure and recommend whether amendments were needed.

Town Manager Keith Hickey said planning director Ross Moldoff told him a town ordinance requires the fees be reviewed every five years. It's been eight years since the last review, after a similar request was rejected two years ago.

Impact fees are collected from developers to help fund the additional public services required as a result of their projects. These include the need for more police and fire services, and increases in student enrollment.

The school, public safety and recreation impact fees are paid by developers to compensate the town for their projects' affect on the community. There had been no complaints from developers that the fees were too high, Hickey said.

The study by Mayberry, manager of BCM Planning of New Gloucester, Maine, will determine whether the fees are fair or even too low.

For a single-family, detached home, a developer must pay a school fee of \$3,991, a recreation fee of \$1,003 and a \$538 public safety fee.

The town collected \$150,169 in impact fees last year, according to Hickey. These include \$84,783 in school fees, \$22,850 in public safety fees, \$21,972 in road fees and \$20,564 in recreation fees, he said.

Salem has collected \$1.2 million in impact fees since 2005, Moldoff said. He said yesterday that the Planning Board had requested the review.

"We have to maintain the legitimacy and integrity of the system," Moldoff said.

The ordinance doesn't require the fees be amended after each review, he said.

Selectmen allocated the money for the study with little comment. Selectmen's Chairman Everett McBride and Selectman Stephen Campbell said yesterday the town wants to be certain fees are being collected fairly.

"It's three years overdue," McBride said. "You don't want to be overcharging. We want to be line with what we should be."

Campbell agreed, saying impact fees need to be reviewed regularly.

"Periodically, you have to look at them," he said. "You can't just arbitrarily charge what you want."