

Published Monday, May 24, 2010

Fairness reason impact fees are being changed

BY [SARAH FAY CAMPBELL](#)

The Times-Herald

Coweta County's new cap on impact fees was devised as a way to bring some fairness and equality to the impact fee system.

On Tuesday, the Coweta Board of Commissioners approved a new impact fee schedule and methodology, and the "capital improvements element," which includes the projects that will be paid for with impact fees charged for new development.

The commissioners also voted to implement a \$7 cap on some impact fees that are assessed based on square footage.

The cap doesn't apply to homes, which are charged on a per-unit basis, or other uses that are charged based on numbers of employees, numbers of service bays, and the like.

Though the cap can be altered at any time, it's not necessarily temporary.

Coweta Administrator Theron Gay said Coweta officials met with impact fee consultant Bill Ross and they came up with the cap "as more or less a solution to keep the fees in a reasonable realm."

Coweta's impact fee methodology report lays out the actual impact fees, and the cap -- which doesn't change the fee but only limits how much of the fee is collected -- is included in the county's impact fee ordinance. The cap can be changed by a simple act of the commissioners -- whereas changing the fee schedule is a complex process involving methodology studies, and regional and state review.

The cap will only apply to a handful of uses. Most impact fees are significantly less than \$7 per square foot.

The uses that have maximum fees higher than \$7 are: quality restaurant, \$8.22 per square foot; high-turnover restaurant, \$11.19 per square foot; fast food restaurant, \$25.28 per square foot; convenience market open 24 hours, \$24.08 per square foot; convenience market open 15 to 16 hours, \$20.83 per square foot; convenience market with gas pumps, \$27.55 per square foot; and drive-in bank, \$13.90 per square foot.

These fees, while high, are significantly lower than the previous fees, enacted in the spring of 2007. For example, under the original fee scheduled, drive-in banks would be charged \$22.77 per square foot, fast food restaurants \$39.74 per square foot, and 24-hour gas stations would be charged a whopping \$45.17 per square foot. Since those fees went into effect, there have been no gas stations, and very few -- if any -- fast food restaurants, built in unincorporated Coweta.

Most commercial uses have much lower fees. A supermarket would pay \$6.09 per square foot under the new impact fee schedule. A shopping center pays \$1.75 per square foot, and a clothing store would pay \$4.97 per square foot. A single-tenant office building would be charged \$2.17 per square foot, and a furniture store would be charged just 64 cents per square foot.

The impact fee for road projects is, by far, the largest portion of the total impact fee. Because fees are calculated based on "trip generation," uses that have a lot of vehicles going in and out, such as gas stations and fast food restaurants, have the highest fees.

However, said Gay, those high numbers of vehicles don't necessarily mean the uses are creating a great deal of traffic -- or a heavy impact on the road system.

"We had a lot of discussion about where that traffic is going -- some of it is local traffic," Gay said. "We looked at it and we just tried to say -- 'what is really fair to everyone?'" Gay said.

Though impact fees are designed to have new developments help pay for the cost of growth, the transportation impact fees do not pay for projects that are directly related to a development. Instead, the fees go to fund half the cost of a specific list of road projects.

The direct effects of greater traffic from a new business are typically addressed with conditions as part of a rezoning or development plan review. Developers are often required to put in turning lanes to support their developments, and paying for traffic lights is sometimes a condition of a rezoning. If a development is accessed from a state highway, the Georgia Department of Transportation requires certain improvements before a driveway permit will be issued.

- [About us](#)
- [Customer Service](#)
- [Social News Forms](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Visitor Agreement](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [Go To Top](#)

© 2010 The Newnan Times-Herald Inc., Newnan, Georgia. Any unauthorized use, copying or mirroring is prohibited.