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Impact fee seen as key to park development

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CEDAR LAKE -- Officials are looking to a recently approved impact fee for the Parks Department to help improve deficiencies in the recreational zone improvement plan.

The Park Board approved a fee of \$1,170 per single family home that will be part of the building permit fee. The money can be used toward the development of the town's parks, according to Mary Joan Dickson, Park Department director. Cedar Lake has 28 park department properties and 17 are undeveloped.

Dickson said without the impact fee the Park Department has been able to obtain land but with a budget of about \$130,000 did not have the revenue to support the development of that land.

"With the community growing, we are not meeting the demand for recreational activities," Dickson said.

The recreational zone improvement plan identified a number of areas where the community could improve its park facilities. Multiuse trails, additional soccer fields, park restrooms, playground equipment in larger parks, another boat launch, piers on the lake and a splash pad of some type were all identified as long-term needs.

Monies from the park impact fee must be used on projects that benefit the greatest number of residents. Dickson said the committee's first priority will be to develop a trail on the east side of the lake near Robin's Nest south. The area was intended for kayaking and walking trails.

"We have a lot of parks, but they are little parks," Dickson said.

Impact fees are a way for communities to deal with growth. The town of Lowell recently identified impact fees as one potential future revenue source during the 2011 budget hearing. The fees may be one way to help offset an ever shrinking budget. The town has 11 park properties, several of which are undeveloped. They are also joint owners of Freedom Park, which gets its share of the department's \$300,000 budget.

The town of St. John already imposes impact fees for its Parks Department and was able to capture much of the growth from the building boom earlier this decade. Chip Sobek, superintendent of parks and recreation in St. John, said the revenues have helped his department acquire park land and equipment. On the down side, the revenue does not help with maintenance.

"It helps us to get stuff, but it doesn't help us to maintain it," Sobek said. Maintaining the town's 28 parks with a department that has a budget of \$280,000 can be a challenge.

Ian Nicolini, Cedar Lake town administrator, said the impact fee will help the Park Department as it continues to grow.

"I think with a growing community want to make sure those people have the quality of life improvements they desire. This is a method for funding those," Nicolini said.

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