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Kane Co. vote pits residents against developers

By James Fuller

What's worth more to local residents — lower property taxes or new jobs? Kane County Board members will answer that question April 10 as they set the county's impact fees for the next five years.

Officials charge an impact fee to developers when a new commercial business or residential building is built in the county. The fee accounts for the additional wear and tear the new people involved with or coming to those developments create on the county's road system. The money is used to repair and upgrade those roads.

Every five years, the county updates what it will charge developers for their projects, and it's time for that update.

County staffers and a committee of representatives from the world of real estate, economic development, labor and local governments have recommended the county keep its impact fees mostly flat for the next two years. That means developers would pay a fee at an amount that would roughly pay for half the damage they cause to local roads while local taxpayers foot the bill for the rest of the cost.

For example, the impact fee to a developer of a supermarket is \$5,774 per 1,000 square feet of store space built. But the real cost of the road maintenance needed because of the added traffic a new supermarket creates is about \$11,487 per 1,000 square feet of store space. Property taxes pay for the difference in the proposed impact fee guidelines facing the county board.

In 2014, the fees on the developer side of that equation would begin to increase in line with a projected rebound of the economy.

Some county board members think too much of the burden falls on developers in the proposal. At a time when unemployment is high, the county should be doing all it can to encourage new commercial development, said board member T.R. Smith.

"I'm here to tell you I've received an awful lot of correspondence from the villages within my district," Smith said. "They feel as though this impact ordinance is driving commercial development out of the area and into the adjoining counties. They aren't happy with this at all."

Smith said, if anything, the county should charge the fees to developers of residential construction — not job-creating commercial projects.

But other board members pointed to the fact that Kane County still has some of the highest foreclosure numbers in the Chicago area. The last thing those homeowners need is the county to tell them they have to pay higher property taxes to maintain roads because more businesses are coming to town.

"This is about who pays for road improvements — taxpayers or the businesses coming in," said county board member Jim Mitchell. "It seems to me it should be the businesses coming in. Overall, the taxpayers can't afford

to pay for the improvements. Maybe LaSalle County doesn't have an impact fee, but you don't see a lot of people going there, do you?"

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