

# Panel recommends fire impact fees for Beaufort, Port Royal

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The Beaufort-Port Royal Joint Municipal Planning Commission unanimously voted Tuesday to recommend that the Beaufort City Council and the Port Royal Town Council impose fire impact fees on new development.

The impact fee, if approved by both councils, would pay for a new fire station, including equipment, that will cost an estimated \$3.4 million. The Beaufort Fire Department wants to build a fire station on Robert Smalls Parkway in the next 10 years, a station that would address the anticipated growth in that area. Because Beaufort and Port Royal share fire services, the cost for the new fire station would be split equally between the two municipalities.

The expected growth differs between Beaufort and Port Royal. Port Royal expects more single family homes and Beaufort expects more commercial growth.

The fire facilities improvement plan that went before the commission delineated the specifics of the proposed fire impact fee. The impact fee is paid by the developer during the permitting process and applies only to new construction.

However, the commission was concerned with the unequal impact fees. In Beaufort, the impact fee will be \$1,079 per new home. In Port Royal, the fee will be \$1,227. The impact fees, per an agreement between the town and city, are calculated based on projected growth.

"I want to raise the issue of what makes sense," said commission member Jim Crower. "Why can't we split (the cost of the new fire station) unequally between the town and city so the houses pay equally?"

Because the municipalities have different projected growth, the calculated fees vary. According to the plan, Beaufort expects 777 new homes to be built by 2018. Port Royal anticipates 1,150 new homes in that same period. However, Beaufort anticipates more commercial growth. According to the plan, impact fees are also charged for "equivalent dwelling units," a term for 1,000 square feet of commercial

development equal to a home in terms of the need for fire service.

"The city has predicted more square footage of commercial development," said Port Royal planner Linda Bridges. "That's where the scales become tipped."

By state law, the plan must get approval from the councils before local governments can charge new construction fire impact fees. When the councils will review the impact fee has not been set. The plan was on the commission's Oct. 6 agenda, but the commission did not have a quorum.

The Beaufort Fire Department wants to build a fire station on Robert Smalls Parkway by 2018. The \$3.4 million cost would be split between Beaufort and Port Royal. Port Royal's proposed fire impact fee: \$1,227 per new home built or 1,000 square feet of commercial space Beaufort's proposed fire impact fee: \$1,079 per new home built or 1,000 square feet of commercial space