



Ravalli County takes step toward impact fees

By JOHN CRAMER of the Ravalli Republic

HAMILTON - Faced with growing pains and a shortage of revenue, the Ravalli County Commission on Monday passed the first reading of an ordinance to adopt impact fees.

The fees are mandatory one-time payments charged to developers to pay for capital improvements at schools, fire departments and other public facilities that are needed because of residential, commercial and industrial growth.

Commissioners voted 4-0 to move forward with impact fees, which state law has allowed local governments to impose since 2005.

Under the proposed ordinance, the fees cannot be imposed for remodeling a structure or rebuilding a damaged structure unless an increase in homes raises demand for public facilities.

The Impact Fee Advisory Committee would conduct at least one public hearing within 45 business days of receiving an impact fee proposal.

The committee would submit its recommendation to the county commission, which would conduct at least one public hearing within 45 days of receiving the committee's recommendation.

Under the ordinance, Ravalli County could accept a land dedication or the construction of public facilities in lieu of payment of impact fees.

At Monday's public meeting, Chris Daniel, a member of the property rights group Higher Ground, encouraged commissioners to earmark impact fees for the district in which they are collected, especially for road work.

“How do we ensure that the money a developer puts in goes toward the impacts being created by that new development?” Daniel said.

Commissioner Alan Thompson said all residents travel beyond their neighborhoods, so road impact fees

spent countywide would benefit everyone.

Commission Chairwoman Carlotta Grandstaff said she considered impact fees a form of tax relief for existing residents because the fees “make new development pay for itself.”

Commissioner Kathleen Driscoll said the commission was “pro-growth, but we have to show a continuity of care” that encourages new development but protects current taxpayers.

Two Ravalli school districts have completed impact fee studies: the Corvallis School Board wants a \$6,800 fee for each new dwelling unit, while the Florence-Carlton School District wants a \$10,000 fee for each new residence.

The commission is scheduled to vote Dec. 4 on the second reading of the impact fee ordinance.

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