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SLO County Supervisors debate on collecting development fees from health center Bob Cuddy

It was a textbook government quandary.

Do they give a guy a break because he has given his fellow citizens — and the county government — a break? Or go strictly by the rules and formulas as written, no matter how arcane or inflexible?

Ultimately, the county Board of Supervisors, seeking a middle ground, came down mostly on the “rules are rules” end.

Dr. H.E. Billig and his wife Melanie wanted to add to an already approved health care

facility at 325 Posada Lane in Templeton.

The addition would join 1,166 square feet to the approved 1,570-square-foot facility. Two other buildings farther away would shut down.

The addition would allow Community Health Centers of the Central Coast to better serve its patients — in dental care, prenatal and other services. The centers serve primarily Medi-Cal patients and low-income residents.

"The county has contracted with CHC since the spring of '04, when we got out of the business of providing primary medical services ourselves," according to Health Agency Director Jeff Hamm.

When the first Templeton building began operating in 2002, the Billigs paid a "road impact fee," which the county collects to make up for the additional traffic it expects a house or subdivision or business to generate.

Road impact fees went up sharply throughout the county in 2003. When the Billigs sought

their additional building, the Department of Public Works sought a new road impact fee, at the higher rate of \$27,656.

The county, using its formulas, brought it down to \$25,723.

The Billigs appealed to the Board of Supervisors, picking up another "appeal fee" of \$639 to "offset the time spent by (the) county staff to prepare this report and present the item to the Board of Supervisors," according to the report.

The Billigs sought a reduction of both fees.

Melanie Billig told supervisors that CHC "fulfills an important health care need in North County," adding that the health care problems for indigent residents is increasingly serious. Supervisor Frank Mecham agreed, noting that the Billigs were doing the county a favor by consolidating three buildings, and that they might have actually decreased traffic, not increased it. In addition, he said, he had been giving the CHC a break on the rent.

However, Glenn Marshall of the Department of Public Works

stuck to the county formula, which includes traffic circulation studies and the cost of road and intersection improvements, among other elements.

Supervisor Bruce Gibson said the county could not lower the fee without a "finding" or reason that would hold up should someone else challenge their fee.

"The process is the process," he said.

He asked for a delay so the county staff could search out a "nexus" between traffic and a reduced fee.

That frustrated Mecham, who noted that "further analysis just exacerbates the cost," which would be passed on to the Billigs. He asked if that made sense.

"Don't drag this to another meeting," Mecham said.

Supervisors didn't. Marshall and the Billigs met with the traffic engineer during lunch and came back in the afternoon with a rationale to reduce the fee.

Moving the work force and patients from three buildings to one did not increase traffic as

much as the formula originally estimated, they said.

In fact, there was a 20 percent trip reduction from the estimate that underlay the \$25,000 fee, Marshall said, and so the fee could slide to \$20,578.

Supervisors went along. But Mecham said later that he does not like the "one size fits all" approach to making decisions.

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