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Tavares poised to extend impact-fee waiver for another year

By Christine Show, Orlando Sentinel

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TAVARES — City leaders are looking to continue waiving impact fees for a second year in a row as a way to attract new construction into the area.

At a meeting last week, City Council members decided in a 4-1 vote to consider waiving the fees typically used to help offset the cost that new development may place on city services, such as police and fire services. Council members will make a final decision when they vote on whether to approve an ordinance on the issue in December. The impact-fee waiver will be an extension to a waiver program they set in place for 2010 — a program that was expected to conclude at the end of this year.

"I think the impact fee [waiver program] has worked outstanding. I'd like to see it continue," Mayor Robert Wolfe said. "To sit there and think that we could continually impact fee people to death is crazy."

'Good and smart'

The city decided to waive impact fees in late 2009 for a year in hopes of jumpstarting the sagging economy and entice builders to develop properties in the city. While the fee waiver applies to any development in the city, including new homes, city officials hope forgoing the fee revenue will bring more commercial development into the area.

"During tough economic times, to have a one-year or two-year waiver of impact fees to do our portion of stimulating an economy in a small-community way is, I think, good and smart," City Administrator John Drury told council members. "But in the long run, I would caution this board to not waive impact fees year after year after year after year...If the economy was strong and all that, you wouldn't see me recommending, as we have here, an impact-fee waiver program."

But council member Lori Pfister, who opposed the waiver program idea last year, wasn't convinced this time around either that cutting impact fees was the right choice for the city.

"I was against it last time. And, unfortunately, I'm still against it," Pfister said

'Green' incentives?

She said the city is not taking into consideration how new construction is being built and its long-lasting effects on the city. She said she wants the city to focus more on making sure developers use more environmentally-friendly products in their construction.

"I don't know why we can't put some incentives for building 'green,'" she said. "I have asked this before. We're just going to dig ourselves into a hole."

Council member Bob Grenier addressed the concern, making a point that developers normally implement conservation initiatives in their building plans.

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"Most contractors, most builders are already thinking green in what materials they use," Grenier said. "Standard construction codes do provide for this."

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