



Tulare County eyes fees on construction

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The first step in a process to begin charging development impact fees on construction in the county, and maybe adding fees to construction within incorporated cities, was begun by Tulare County Supervisors on Tuesday.

On a 4-1 vote with Supervisor Phil Cox voting no, supervisors approved a resolution requiring all future development be subject to the Public Facility Impact Fee program county wide.

Presently, the County does not charge development fees. In cities, development fees add thousands of dollars to the cost of a new home or more on a large project.

The County intends to use the revenue from the fees for new facilities, including the South County Justice Center in Porterville. The roads fee — about \$1,000 per home in the Porterville area — would be used to maintain county roads.

In cities, fees cover costs for sewer, water, streets and other services.

According to estimates included with the resolution, fees in the South County will add about \$8,000 to the price of an average home. That total includes \$1,005 per dwelling for roads; \$1,607 for public protection; \$492 for fire protection, \$339 for the county library, \$454 for parks; another \$483 for sheriff patrol and a whopping \$3,386 for general government.

Fees vary depending on the type of construction. For example, a fee of \$2.50 per square foot would be charged for commercial buildings.

County Chief Administrative Officer Jean Rousseau said the money is to replace and upgrade County buildings, many older than 50 years, he said.

“We have a lot of old County facilities that need to be upgraded. That’s the most important thing,” said the County CAO.

After builders objected to the fees, supervisors stressed the resolution only included estimates and that final fees still need to be worked out.

“The fees need to be looked at,” said Fifth District Supervisor Mike Ennis. “This is just the start of the process.”

He and County Resource Management Agency Director Jake Raper said the County intends to reach out to both the cities and developers to implement the program. He gave a date to begin charging fees by March of next year, but supervisors, city officials and those in the building industry said it will take several months to work out the details, including the fees.

Bob Keenan with the Home Builders Association of Tulare and Kings Counties, called the fees illegal, saying the County has no authority to charge fees inside city limits.

The County wants to be able to add fees onto construction in the eight cities, including Porterville, but city

leaders do not appear too keen on that idea.

“Cities will have to agree to impose the fees in city limits,” said Porterville City Manager John Lollis, adding the fee issue has been part of the negotiations between the County and the cities over the County General Plan.

For Porterville, based on the estimated fees, the cost of an average home would go up about \$4,200. That would be added to what the City already charges in impact fees.

Steve Peck, vice president with Mangano Company in Visalia, said the fees in the resolution appear way out of line. He suggested the County begin meeting not only with cities, but with builders and even chamber of commerce officials to come up with a new fee schedule.

County officials say the fees are needed to generate revenue for the County to continue to provide services. Due to a drop in state revenues, the County has seen its budget cut by \$18 million in the past two years.

Ennis pointed out that it is unlikely the County will be seeing any significant dollars from the state or federal government any time soon.

Lollis said he wants to see what benefit there will be for city residents if the fees are charged within the city.

“I think the basis of the benefit needs to be defined,” he said. He did add he did not feel the fees were “unreasonable,” but that more study is needed.

While Cox questioned the lack of effort by the County so far in reaching out to cities and developers, Supervisor Allen Ishida said it has taken the County several years to get to this point.

“I don’t see any reason for further delay. It’s time to put everybody on notice that we intend to do this.”