

Tulare County plans new impact fees

BY DAVID CASTELLON • dcastell@visalia.gannett.com • December 3, 2010

Fees to build new homes, offices, stores and other buildings in Tulare County likely will increase, but how much and how those fees will be used may become a point of contention with the construction industry.

County supervisors this week approved a resolution to formally notify cities and builders of plans to develop what the county is calling public facility impact and roadway fees.

Those fees wouldn't be limited to new construction in the unincorporated county. Officials also plan to charge fees for new developments in Tulare County's cities.

How much those fees will be has yet to be determined, although they would vary for different parts of the county.

A set of preliminary fee estimates prepared by a consulting firm for the county suggests combined fees of \$5,708 for a single-family home in Visalia.

That's on top of the \$8,804 in impact fees the city already charges for new single-family homes, along with additional impact fees that can vary among neighborhoods.

The county has never charged impact fees before. Fees in unincorporated areas would be higher — a \$6,774 impact fee alone for a single-family home along with a roadway fee ranging from \$816 to \$2,181, depending on location.

Suggested fees for commercial structures, apartment buildings and other structures are based on square footage.

The intent of the fees doesn't appear to sit well with builders, developers and others with stakes in Tulare County's growth.

"It jacks [up] the price of new homes and new businesses and industries," said Bob Keenan, president and chief executive officer of the Home Builders Association of Tulare/Kings Counties Inc. Considering the bad economy, it's not a smart move,

he said.

"We had over 30 percent unemployment in the construction industry. That was six months ago, and I don't think it's gotten any better. It's probably worse."

"We are not generally opposed to fees. We understand there are needs in the community" to find new funding sources, Glenn Morris, president and chief executive officer of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, told the supervisors before Tuesday's vote.

But he urged the supervisors to hold off on the vote because the local building industry hadn't been asked by the county Resource Management Agency to offer much input on roadway and impact fees.

Keenan said RMA officials had discussed the fees with him prior to Tuesday's board meeting but hadn't presented information to the rest of the HBA membership.

RMA Director Jake Raper told the supervisors that his office plans to reach out to the business community to get input on the fees, but the vote to announce the county's intent was the first part of the process.

Raper said the fees would help pay for necessities that come with growth, which include jail expansion, road widening, additional law and fire services.

"If you look at where the growth is occurring, 75 to

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80 percent will grow within the cities," he said.

County officials said some other counties have implemented impact fees in their unincorporated areas as well as in their cities, including Merced, Stanislaus, Fresno and Solano counties.

Another concern is where the collected fees will be spent, Visalia City Manager Steve Salomon said.

He said officials from the cities have discussed the county creating zones for where each city's fees could be spent, "so if the people in Porterville are paying a transportation fee, it should benefit something in the Porterville area."

Raper acknowledged that there is a lot of work to be done — including setting up the legislative authority for the county to charge the fees in cities — before they could be set and collected, possibly some time in 2011.



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