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Veterans and Belleview officials try to work out fee impasse

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BELLEVIEW — City commissioners and members of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8083 want to reduce some impact fees for the veterans' club. But a few things stand in the way: an ordinance the commission amended and a quickly approaching deadline for already reduced impact fees.

Belleview VFW Post 8083 officials asked the city commission to reduce the post's water impact fees during a Tuesday night meeting, but commissioners agreed to vote on the issue later.

The post, which is outside the city limits, owes more than \$6,200 in impact fees. It was eligible to connect to the city's water line as part of the water main extension project along South U.S. 441. As part of the deal, the city also reduced impacts fees by half and connection fees by a third.

Bill Kirsop, post president and a Korean War veteran, said the group signed the contract and understood its obligation to pay the impact fees, but with an aging membership and limited funds, paying the fees outright would devastate the post's charitable giving ability.

Kirsop said he came to the commission meeting reluctantly.

"My membership, as all veterans, we're pretty proud people and we don't look for handouts," he said.

Most commissioners supported eliminating or reducing the impact fees for the group.

"I would definitely consider this request if we could legally do that," said Commissioner Christine Dobkowski, noting the group's military service.

Current ordinances allow for businesses to pay impact fees in installments for up to five years. That comes with conditions, however, including a 12 percent interest rate and monthly administrative fees.

Mayor Tammy Moore proposed giving the post an additional 25 percent discount, payable over five years with no interest.

"We all know how we feel about our veterans," she said. "If I could give it to you for nothing, I would say yes absolutely."

But that may not be possible.

Public Works Director Dennis Monroe said the ordinance would probably need to be changed as it doesn't provide for exceptions. That's on top of regulations and bonding issues tied to impact fees, he said.

Kirsop said he understand the dilemma the commission was facing.



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Commissioner Gary Ernst said the group could always pursue installments, but Dobkowski said that would be a last resort.

Complicating a decision is the ordinance reducing the impact fee, which sunsets in September.

"We do want to work with them," said Commissioner Kenneth Nadeau. "We just have to figure out how our rules will let us do this."

The commission agreed to table a decision until City Attorney Fred Landt returns from vacation.

Also at Tuesday's meeting, Nadeau, who is running for the District 2 County Commission seat, voted against a measure changing term lengths for commissioners and the mayor to four years.

Currently, commissioners serve for two years and the mayor for three.

Commissioners, including Nadeau, praised amending the charter to save money by avoiding off-year elections and increasing voter turnout.

"I had a nightmare that we elected the worst person possible to be mayor," he said. "If we elect someone whose leadership style is quite poor, we're hamstrung with that person for four years."

He suggested changing the term length for mayor to only two years.

"We have the right to impeach anyone that's up here with 10 percent of the voters," Moore said.

"That's messy," Nadeau replied.

Moore said that as mayor, she doesn't have control. Commissioners make motions and have control over the issues.

Ernst said it comes down to communication.

"If you have a mayor that's not fulfilling their duties, you should be able to talk to the mayor with (City Clerk) Sandi (McKamey) and say, 'You need to tighten up here,'" he said.

Dobkowski said turnout isn't just low on the voter side when Nadeau then suggested reducing all terms to two years.

"It's hard to find five people who want to run," she said.

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