

Surprise plans for jump in growth

By Richard Smith, DAILY NEWS-SUN | Posted: Wednesday, February 5, 2014 12:00 pm

Surprise started on the path toward its new impact fee structure during Tuesday's special City Council meeting.

The recently scheduled meeting, necessary to provide residents with two public hearings, focused on land use assumptions and infrastructure improvements.

As Chief Financial Officer Bob Wingenroth expected, the topic received scant response. No members of the public spoke during the hearing, and council members had few comments.

"There may not be as much interest in this public hearing as in the future when we roll out dollar amounts," he said.

Those numbers — for development impact fees — are unveiled March 11, the same night the council will vote on whether to approve the land use assumptions and infrastructure improvements.

A public hearing on development impact fees is slated for April 15. And the council's final vote will be May 20.

If approved the impact fees take effect in August.

Tuesday's presentation went more into growth projections and the infrastructure needed to keep up.

According to city figures, Surprise's population will increase 39 percent between 2012 and 2020. The projected population as the next decade starts is 164,037. And the number of houses in the city should jump 41 percent in the same timeframe.

The presentation focused on five main areas:

- Fire and emergency medical service fees. Chief among these are two new planned fire stations.
- 163rd Avenue roadway fees. These will affect those in the areas near this road north of Grand Avenue.

This section has been in Surprise for more than two decades but roads and other infrastructure projects have lagged.

"The whole concept of impact fees really threw that neighborhood for a loop," Mayor Sharon Wolcott said.

- Water system and resources.
- Wastewater system fees, which include some still-outstanding debt tied to the SPA 1 facility in southwest Surprise.
- Current fees to repay for fire, police, parks and recreation and general government.

Wingenroth called the city's plan for impact fee updates conservative. In large part that's caused by the state Legislature narrowing the scope of projects for which the fees can be used.

“The notion that growth pays for itself is antiquated,” Wolcott said. “(The new laws) are really conservative and don’t allow us to address quality of life issues.”

Wingenroth also wants to change how the city addresses impact fees. Ideally, the city will review impact fees and tweak them as needed every two years.

- After the discussion the council adjourned into another executive session on legal issues tied to the proposed WinCo at Loop 303 and Bell Road. No action was taken.