

Traffic impact fee increases not popular

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Developers were predictably indignant about Stanwood's proposed traffic impact fee increase.

The increase, to be clear, would be huge: from \$231 per trip to \$1,162 per trip. For a new single-family residence, calculated at 9.57 trips, the cost would increase from \$2,216 to \$11,120. The rate was last adjusted in 2005.

Several developers spoke, each certain that increasing traffic impact fees would turn Stanwood into a ghost town as potential projects fled for fear of never ever being profitable.

The city's argument for increasing the fees is that funding needs have changed as the capital improvement plan has been updated, and so new impact fees would fund necessary projects.

But developers at the meeting said this was the wrong way to go about it, and that if the city increased fees, developers would go somewhere cheaper and take their business — their money — with them. Then the city would have nothing.

The Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish counties sent a letter to the city, which Deborah Knight, city administrator, read into the record.

"Home builders are dealing with other new, extraordinary costs already," the letter read, citing code amendments and "green" building standards as some of the factors that add to the cost of projects.

At least one resident thought this was a little dramatic.

More development needs more infrastructures, and Virginia Fitzpatrick thinks the people doing the developing should fund that infrastructure for which they created the need.

Fitzpatrick said she's bored with "developers passing the costs to taxpayers in the township."

"I'd rather have farmers as neighbors anyway," Fitzpatrick said. "They cost less. And provide a valuable service."

Randy Heagle, with Windermere Real Estate, thinks a compromise can be reached.

Heagle said the city should look at its "competitors" — Marysville, Arlington, Mount Vernon — and see what they are charging for traffic impact fees.

"In the next five years, I see a great opportunity to grow ourselves, and we don't want to miss that opportunity by overpricing ourselves," Heagle said. "I'm happy to jump on a work committee or whatever needs to be done to do due diligence."

After the public hearing on traffic impact fees, council passed a six-month moratorium on recreational marijuana in the city.

Washington State Liquor Control Board (LCB) will begin issuing licenses for recreational marijuana in December. These regulations are separate from those for medical marijuana.

Cities can adopt their own regulations for recreational marijuana, too, but if they don't, LCB rules and policies are enacted by default. Stanwood's moratorium will give city staff time to work out a policy and write the code to enact it.

Councilman Matt McCune voted against the moratorium. All other members voted yes. Elizabeth Callaghan and Rick Randall were absent and excused. Mayor Dianne White was absent, too, and mayor pro tem Leonard Kelley officiated in her stead.

In other council news:

- As part of its consent agenda, council authorized Mayor Dianne White to reappoint Dale Tetlow and Sonja Butler to the salary commission. Tetlow and Butler's terms expire in February 2014. They will each be reappointed for three years.
- Council approved the design phase of City Hall and police station renovations. Previously, council authorized the investigation phase of the projects, which has been completed under budget: The estimate was \$26,414 and the actual cost was only \$13,000. Phases two and three — design and permits and bid documents — is estimated to cost \$51,000. There is money in the city's building improvement fund to cover the cost.