

Big houses in Avon could pay more for water

Developers have been building bigger houses than expected, using up water rights faster

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AVON, CO COLORADO,

AVON, Colorado — Builders of big houses in Avon may have to pay more for water rights.

The Avon Town Council might impose a fee for water rights for large new homes. The town would charge an extra \$1.40 for every square foot over 3,000 square feet the home spans. For example, a builder would pay an additional \$4,200 for water rights for a 6,000-square-foot home. Those fees are on top of existing water tap fees.

"The underlying issue here is the houses that are being built in Avon are bigger in size than the houses that were originally planned in the town, for which water was allocated," Mayor Ron Wolfe said.

As far as the water supply goes, the town had planned for enough water rights to service homes 3,000 square feet or smaller, Wolfe said.

"As Avon has become more resort-oriented, the developers would tell you the market demand is for bigger, more costly houses," he said.

Those homes are using up the town's water rights faster than officials expected.

In the mountaintop Wildridge neighborhood, for example, the average house since 2005 has spanned just over 3,800 feet, town project engineer Jeff Schneider said. Likewise, homes built in the Mountain Star neighborhood have averaged 8,300 square feet over the past four years, he said. However, because of a previous agreement with the town, the impact fee would only apply to Mountain Star homes over 7,500 square feet, Schneider said.

The town would use money from the impact fees to buy more water rights for future development, Wolfe said.

"We're just saying big houses have to bring water to compensate for their impact on the community," he said.

If the town doesn't impose the impact fee, it could have to raise taxes to cover water rights for future development, Wolfe argues. And he doesn't think that's fair to residents who aren't building new homes.

"If we did fund it (by raising taxes), there would be other things we couldn't do, and why would it be fair for all taxpayers in the town of Avon to lose the use of money when they didn't cause the problem?" Wolfe said.

One estimate claims that the town would need to spend \$1.5 million for water if developers build everything that's allowed under the current zoning laws, Wolfe said. That's based on a negotiation with a Front Range utility supplier that never went through, Schneider said.

The Avon Town Council plans to review the proposal Sept. 8. If approved, the fee would go into effect in October, Wolfe said.

The Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority provides water service to Avon. The authority allocates water rights in units of water for a home 3,000 square feet or less, known as "single family equivalents." On average, a home 3,000 square feet or smaller uses 5,000 to 7,000 gallons of water per month, said Diane Johnson, community relations manager for the authority.

A 2005 lease with the authority allows Avon to use a total of 4,984 SFEs. Existing or proposed developments have already used up all but 1,565 of those SFEs.

The town requires big developments like the Riverfront subdivision — which includes the Westin hotel — to buy

additional water rights for their projects so they don't dip into the town's supply.

If the town uses up its existing water rights, it can buy more from the water authority, as long as the water authority has those additional water rights available, said Linn Brooks, assistant general manager for the Upper Eagle River Water and Sanitation District.

Separately, Avon is trying to negotiate with the Colorado River Water Conservation District for more water rights.

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