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Cedar City Council approves budget

JOSH HUNTSMAN • JHUNTSMAN@THESPECTRUM.COM • PUBLISHED: JUNE 23, 2011 4:55AM - LAST MODIFIED: JUNE 23, 2011 7:09AM

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CEDAR CITY - The Cedar City Council approved a revised 2011-12 budget during its council meeting Wednesday. Public concerns regarding impact fees also took place in a hearing at the meeting.

One budgetary issue of concern for the council was money saved by the Aquatic Center that is earmarked for the capital improvement fund. However, Councilwoman Nina Barnes, and the recreation board, asked for a small percentage of that money be used for purchasing exercise equipment and day care equipment for the center.

Information was given to the council regarding other city's day care model, but the council didn't feel it was enough to make a decision.

"We need this to be a discussion beyond this budget I think," Councilwoman Georgia Beth Thompson said.

The council did approve \$5,000 for exercise equipment and passed the revised 2011-12 budget.

The council also heard public concern regarding evaluation of impact fees sponsored by the city through the company Wikstrom Economics. Karen Wikstrom gave an overview to the council on the premise of impact fees.

Wikstrom said impact fees are levied on new construction to help maintain a "level of service" for parks and recreation, police, fire department, sewage and other public services.

"We look at what the city is providing right now and we call that our level of service," Wikstrom said. "We then say if more people come into the area, the financial burden to maintain that level of service does not fall on existing residents."

The revised impact fee proposal showed reduced fees in parks and recreation because of decreased land values. The overall picture showed impact fees for all types of construction being lowered.

Examples from the summary included impact fees on a single-family residence being lowered from \$9,966 to \$8,095. A 232,000-square-foot commercial building would see impact fees lowered from \$865,160 to \$689,209.

This lowering of impact fees wasn't enough to satisfy many public members involved in construction and real estate who voiced strong opposition to impact fees during the public comment portion of the public hearing.

Realtor Jennie Hendricks spoke on behalf of Iron County Realtors and said in Cedar City 52 empty lots have sold out of an available 432 over the last year. Hendricks asked the council to "think about the whole market place before making decisions with impact fees."

Many public comments called for the elimination of impact fees completely to stimulate growth. Mayor Joe Burgess called the debate concerning impact fees a "philosophical argument" that will require more research before a final decision is made.

"Our biggest challenge in this city is to create jobs," Burgess said. "Above everything we need to create jobs."

The council chose to revisit the issue of impact fees in two weeks.

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It is time to ELIMINATE "Impact Fees"!! They are just a money grab by the City. \$8,000 on the average single family home!? For what? The Cedar City Council needs to step up and eliminate these ridiculous money grabbing fees.

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