

Impact fees leave a bitter taste for owners of candle/coffee shop

By [MIKE WRIGHT](#) 

Trish Antonetti now knows the true value of an impact fee.

Antonetti and her business partner, Bernadette Poorman, opened Wicks Are Us candle shop in the Inverness Regional Shopping Center six years ago.

Bernadette Poorman and Trish Antonetti, owners of Wicks Are Us, may cease serving coffee Monday because of a \$7,000 impact fee assessed on their candle store when they started selling coffee and food in addition to merchandise they have been selling at their Inverness store. /[DAVE SIGLER](#)/Chronicle

About two years ago, they decided to sell coffee and light sandwiches in the same shop. No redecorating, other than adding some tables and chairs. No cooking, no new construction.

The pair added a coffee occupational license from the county. They received a state li-cense to sell coffee.

All went well until a few weeks ago when someone in the plaza complained to the city that Wicks Are Us was operating a restaurant without a license.

The city sent an inspector and, sure enough, that's what he found.

Development Director Ken Koch told the business partners they needed a city occupa-tional license to operate a restaurant, along with a building permit for accessories associated with selling food.

Then came the kicker.

Because Antonetti and Poorman changed their original use of the store, from selling can-dles to selling coffee, they were required to pay an additional county impact fee.

The price tag: \$7,000.

"They had us so scared," Antonetti said. "The more I think about it, the madder I get."

Koch said the city is simply following guidelines that the business partners should have adhered to in the first place.

Impact fees are one-time charges generally assigned to new construction to pay for the impacts of growth. Impact fees fund improvements in such areas as roads, law enforcement

and schools.

The county also charges an impact fee when a business changes into a more intensive use, particularly in terms of traffic.

"Obviously a restaurant generates more trips than retail," Koch said.

The impact fee is not retroactive, but it is charged whenever a business receives a city license or building permit. Wicks Are Us wasn't charged the impact fee when it added coffee sales because no one from the city knew about it.

Koch gave Wicks Are Us until Monday to come into compliance. If they haven't done that, the city may send the shopping center owner a notice of code violations.

The alternative is to shut down the coffee operation, which Antonetti is considering.

Antonetti said the timing is poor because the business partners are trying to buy a house on Tompkins Street that they hope to refurbish for a restaurant. Their lease at Inverness Regional ends in a year.

Antonetti, 38, said she was born and raised in Inverness. She and Poorman worked together at a land title company before deciding to get into business together.

"We always thought a coffee shop would be fun," Antonetti said.

Antonetti said she isn't opposed to paying what she owes, but she said the rules are murky and not well explained.

"It is very confusing to a new business or a start-up business," she said. "We're between a rock and a hard place."