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# Development fee study shows how Columbia stacks up

**By KAT WINGERT of the Tribune's staff**

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A study of development fees in 40 Midwest cities shows that Columbia ranks fourth-lowest among 27 cities that charge a standard development fee to help pay for off-site infrastructure.

But the study's rankings might present only part of the picture.

Ben Londeree, co-chairman of the Boone County Smart Growth Coalition and professor emeritus at the University of Missouri-Columbia, presented his study on infrastructure costs to the Columbia City Council during its Sept. 17 meeting.

Londeree compiled the study during the past six months by contacting the cities and gathering data on how they pay for new infrastructure - such as sewers, roads, parks, waterlines and storm-water detention - not located on the site of new construction.

Londeree's study includes a list of 27 cities that charge developers a set fee for off-site infrastructure. The list ranks the cities based on those fees for building a 2,000-square-foot house with 2½ bathrooms on a 10,000-square-foot lot.

Topping the list is Boulder, Colo., which charges \$22,786 in development fees for a home of that size. Columbia ranks 24th with \$1,200 worth of fees for the same house.

What the rankings don't show is the amount developers pay in the 13 cities that don't have set development fees. Most of those cities charge developers "exaction" fees to collect money for off-site infrastructure costs. Those fees might add up to more or less than a standard per-house fee.

For example, although St. Charles was listed as having no development fees, the city decides what developers should pay on a case-by-case basis. St. Charles Planning Manager Dave Tomek said developers must agree to pay for off-site improvements to have their plans approved.

Londeree's study did include an explanation of each city's exactions but

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could not list amounts because they differ for each development. He said he decided to do the study because he wanted to help start a public discussion on who should pay the costs of growth. He said it is a follow-up on a study he worked on with the Smart Growth Coalition in 2001 that outlined how much a new home costs the city.

Annie Pope of the Home Builders Association of Columbia said she doesn't think the study is meaningful because it doesn't take into account the "exaction" fees - money developers sometimes pay for off-site improvements in addition to the development fees. "Most of the time there are off-site improvements included in development agreements in addition to impact fees," Pope said.

Columbia City Manager Bill Watkins said Londeree's study gives the city additional information to consider as it examines its development fees but there are difficulties with putting different communities in the same model. "Every community has a different way of paying for infrastructure," he said. "It's hard to categorize them in one study."

In Columbia, Watkins said, new homeowners pay for the cost of infrastructure in their subdivision and the off-site costs of infrastructure are usually split between developers and the city. He added that one of the city's largest concerns is not only paying for growth and new infrastructure but maintaining infrastructure in older neighborhoods.

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As a proponent of increasing the amount developers pay for infrastructure, Fourth Ward Councilman Jerry Wade said the study provides a starting place for comparisons.

"I think he chose real comparable communities, with a lot of university communities and a lot of cities in Missouri that are similar in size," Wade said. "I think it's the start of building a good database of cities. What he has is not answers; it's data."

Pope said she hopes the city doesn't make a decision based on one person's study.

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