

Council to consider second impact fee

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By Louisa Barber

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The Sidney City Council will consider whether to adopt the second of five impact fees the city plans to implement on new developments Tuesday.

The park impact fees come after water and sewer and are intended to address impacts to parks due to increased population. Current recommendations charge single-family detached housing developments a maximum \$1,018.38 fee and \$828.72 for most other types of housing. RV parks and hotel/motel fees are in the works.

Sixteen of Sidney's parks are eligible to receive funds collected from the impact fees, ranging from \$163,000 for restrooms/concessions/storage at North Park (Water Tower) to \$500 to remove an aging fire hydrant at Peterson Park.

The total estimated cost eligible for impact fees comes to a little more than \$1.8 million. However, no more than \$1.5 million can be collected from 2013 to 2020 because it exceeds the park improvements needed to provide the existing level of service to future residents.

While the city council can adopt the maximum allowable fee, it can set it at whatever it wants, like it did the first impact fees. The council adopted its first set of fees in October for \$2,500, significantly lower than the maximum. "I got a hunch the council will lower it," Public Works director Jeff Hintz said.

Impact fees are coming at a pivotal time when Richland County is increasingly becoming home to more subdivisions. Building inspector Alton Hillesland says housing developments have steadily increased since 2010. Some 1,200 new homes are on the horizon. Asked whether he expects this summer will be busy, Hillesland couldn't say, except for what Interstate Engineering president Brian Milne quipped recently: "You're going to be a busy man."

"I just have a gut feeling that this is different than the other ones because there's too many big companies coming in and investing millions of dollars. They must know something that we don't," he said.

As for these impact fees, three more are on the way. After parks comes streets – with a list of potential uses for these funds is in the works – then police and fire. It'll be a challenge, says Dave DeGrandpre, the consultant setting up the fees, since they can only be used for equipment that will last at least 10 years. These are not for salaries or general maintenance, nor correcting deficiencies if, say, the city's operations fall out of compliance with state regulations.

Water and sewer impact fees are in the midst of being collected, and Hintz has his eyes on the funds. He wants a new camera to inspect sewer lines. "The one we've got doesn't work really good anymore," he said. These can cost upwards of \$100,000 each.

After a resolution to implement park impact fees is introduced Tuesday, the council is expected to adopt it during the March 4 meeting. DeGrandpre expects to implement a new impact fee once a month.

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