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New fees take effect: 9 categories impact builders

By Angela De Welles, Independent Newspapers

It just became more expensive to obtain a building permit in Mesa.

Higher development impact fees, the one-time cost charged to new structures to help a municipality cover the demands of new growth, went into effect Sept. 3 in Mesa.

Mesa charges impact fees in nine categories, including, water, wastewater, parks, cultural, libraries, public safety, fire, general government and storm drainage.

According to Terry Williams, the building safety director for Mesa, the fee for a single-family home increased from \$5,233 to \$8,321. The fee for non-residential buildings shifted from \$1,130 per square foot to \$1,881.

Mr. Williams said the impact fees for multi-family residences increased from \$3,340 per unit to \$5,261 and the development impact fee charged to new manufactured homes jumped from \$2,190 to \$3,238.

“(The fees) were all adjusted the last time in 2004, except for fire and public safety,” Mr. Williams said. “Those have gone back three times to council and were last amended in 2006.”

State laws outline timelines for putting new impact fees into effect, Mr. Williams said. After an extensive public comment period, there is a 90-day notification period following any decision by city council members to change the fees.

“They’re effective on all permits issued after that time,” he said.

Mr. Williams said there definitely was a rush in the past two months of builders hoping to get a permit issued before the new rates went into effect.

“We’ve seen, I would say we’re looking at a 15-20 percent increase (in permit applications) over the last two months,” he said.

He has heard a few complaints from builders who have not planned adequately, but says there was plenty of time to know about the fee





change.

“The city started this process in March 2006. We spent six months gathering current data. We started utilizing the services of an outside consultant in October 2006,” said Mr. Williams, adding that the council took action and approved the higher fees in June. “The citizens and the development community have been well aware this was coming.”

Some of the increase can be accounted for in a new way that Mesa calculates the cost for water and wastewater, Mr. Williams said.

Now the water fees take into account the cost of finding water to meet future demands, Mr. Williams said.

Lauren Barnett, deputy director for the Homebuilders Association of Central Arizona, said her group agrees that most impact fees are needed to help municipalities deal with growth.

However, the HACA, a group representing Arizona homebuilders and developers, feels the cultural impact fee that Mesa charges is uncalled for, according to Ms. Barnett.

“We do not believe that Mesa’s cultural impact fees meet the state’s requirements,” she said.

Besides the cultural impact fee, Ms. Barnett said the increase comes at a particularly bad time for the homebuilding community.

“The timing of the 63 percent increase could not be worse,” she said. “These are dark days for homebuilders.”

The fees, which are paid by who applies for the building permit, are usually passed on to homebuyers, Ms. Barnett said.

Mesa’s fees are not unique in Arizona. Ms. Barnett said other municipalities also rely on impact fees to help pay for new growth, but she does not think they should rely too heavily on the funding source, saying if cities and towns in Arizona wanted to be forward-thinking, they would rely on other funding methods.

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