

No impact fee, no problem: Valley schools' Ryan Stokes addresses questions on school impact fee, affordable housing project

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Next year's school impact fee will be \$8,000. Or \$3,300 per multifamily unit. Either way, it's a fee the Snoqualmie Valley School District won't receive from any construction in the affordable housing area of Snoqualmie Ridge. And either way, it's not a problem.

"We don't really budget impact fees, because they're unpredictable," said Ryan Stokes, the district's director of business services. Besides, the school district won't receive impact fees from any affordable housing project on Snoqualmie Ridge, whether it's the proposed Imagine Housing development, or another project.

"In their (Snoqualmie's) master plan it states that for affordable housing, they will not collect impact fees," he said.

Impact fees are one-time charges on new home construction that are intended to offset the effect of the home buyers on their neighborhoods' schools (or other taxing districts' projects, such as parks). Typically, cities collect the fees for school districts through property taxes, and then give the funds to the districts. Since 2004, however, the city of Snoqualmie has waived collecting any impact fees on affordable housing projects, as specified in a development agreement with Quadrant.

Imagine Housing proposed last summer to build 160 units of multifamily affordable housing, sparking a community-wide discussion on the tax burden and other implications of the development to property owners and to the school district.

Although the district won't receive the potential half-million dollars in impact fees from the project, it will receive most or all of the school-age children to move into those units.

One possible effect Stokes said, is "it may accelerate the need for a new elementary school."

Another possibility is the broader financial impact of a property tax break for the following 8 to 12 years, for buyers of the proposed homes. Snoqualmie's City Council approved a new city ordinance June 24 that would allow a tax exemption for affordable housing projects under specific conditions.

The exemption is not automatically granted to affordable housing projects, but if Imagine Housing were to receive it, property owners would see a small tax rate increase, to account for that. According to the city website, the increase would be roughly 3.5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

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