
Impact fee process hits more hurdles

By Keven Todd
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When the Fernley Capital Improvements Advisory Committee meets 6 p.m. tonight at City Hall, there will be at least two items on the agenda relating to impact fees.

But how quickly the whole process moves forward may have been stunted by action at last week's city council session.

At the Oct. 15 meeting, city council voted down a \$39,865 supplemental contract extension with Orth-Rodgers Associates for revisions and modification to land use assumptions, growth rates and other data that was utilized to develop the first model of how impact fees might look in Fernley.

The cost of the projects being considered for funding by the impact fees and the formula used to calculate the proposed fees quickly drew harsh criticism from citizens as well as builders and developers in this high desert community.

Impact fees initially being considered could have potentially added \$350,000 to the cost of a movie theater or \$65,000 to the total price tag for opening a sandwich shop.

The Capital Improvements Advisory Committee then began to dissect the various pieces of data used to calculate the impact fees and uncovered a number of flaws in the data.

One potential problem centered on data used to develop land use assumptions, which are a part of the overall formula. The data was compiled in 2005, a record year for growth in Fernley. Growth rates for the city have cooled considerably in the past couple of years.

While the process for how the committee moves forward in the development of impact fees may gain some clarification at tonight's meeting, the road ahead seems muddier than ever before.

Public Works Director Lowell Patton gave a brief overview to city council at last Wednesday's meeting regarding why staff was recommending approval of the contract extension, but Ward 2 Councilman Joe Mortensen was quick to motion that council deny the proposed contract extension due to economics and the pending outcome of elections.

The council then began to question Patton on how the process would move forward without Orth-Rodgers.

"The staff report indicates no further work can be done on impact fees. We all agree that we'll need road impact fees," said Cal Eilrich, Ward 5. "Even the Capital Improvements Advisory Committee was lukewarm to Orth-Rodgers. I think we need to put this out for bid proposals."

Patton told the council that "some work" will continue on the impact fee process and that the city could request additional information from Orth-Rodgers. "The impact fee process does not go away."

Ward 4 Councilman Curt Chaffin asked Patton how much the city had paid Orth-Rodgers so far on the project.

"There have been multiple stages, perhaps \$80,000," Patton said. "If we go with another firm, some of the data developed by Orth-Rodgers is proprietary."

Eilrich responded by telling Patton that proprietary or not, the city paid for the information.

Concurring, Chaffin said, "We paid for it, so it needs to be made available to the city."

Monte Martin, Ward 3, then cautioned that complex formulas take time to develop and analyze, which is why many firms don't want to make them available.

"I was at the last Capital Improvements Advisory Committee meeting and the traffic modeling was based on assumptions that are no longer viable," Ward 1 Councilwoman Elayne Logue said.

"If we do what's being proposed, then we're back to square one," Martin said.

The council then voted the proposed contract extension down 4-1 with Martin casting the lone dissenting vote.

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