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Impact fees head for vote next month

By **JOHN STANG/Daily Inter Lake**

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It's almost showtime for the Kalispell City Council on the long-running road-impact-fee controversy.

The council gave its staff a bunch of choices Monday on what it wants to vote on.

The staff hopes to get the choices on the city's Web site — www.kalispell.com — before March 2.

The council will hold a public hearing on those choices at 7 p.m. March 2, before voting at a 7 p.m. March 9 special meeting on what the new road-impact-fee system will be.

"Lets get some meat and go for it," council member Bob Hafferman said.

About the only sure thing about the March 9 votes is that most council members appear satisfied with how traffic-volume figures were calculated.

Plus, it appears likely that the council will trim some of the proposed fees.

The big unknowns are how and how much.

The council requested several options to vote on March 9, including:

- Should the road impact fees be trimmed by cutting the number of street improvements that they will pay for?

Right now, the proposed fees are supposed to raise \$12.4 million for 10 projects.

Several council members believe the best way to trim the fees is to cut the \$12.4 million project list.

One scenario would trim \$6.1 million from the \$12.4 million list — reducing the fees by 49 percent.

The removed projects would be: upgrading parts of Three Mile Drive and Four Mile Drive, extending Grandview Drive to Whitefish Stage Road, extending 18th Street, and upgrading Seventh Avenue East North where it connects to Whitefish Stage Road.

Left on the list would be extending Rose Crossing from Whitefish Stage Road to Farm-To-Market Road, plus upgrading

parts of Four Mile Drive, Stillwater Road, West Springcreek Road and Two Mile Drive.

A second scenario would remove the Rose Crossing project as well — reducing the impact fees by 65 percent.

Council member Hank Olson said he might propose removing only the \$2.98 million Grandview Drive extension project.

- How should grandfathering the fees be tackled for projects already on paper at city hall?

This issue will significantly affect Glacier Town Center, Hutton Ranch Plaza and Spring Prairie projects in northern Kalispell.

Two proposals will be considered on March 9.

One proposal is to link the grandfathering to when a developer obtains a building permit.

As soon as a building permit is obtained, the permit holder has six months to begin construction before it expires.

Several council members want to give a discount on road impact fees to any project that obtains a building permit within a specific period of time after the fees are adopted -- with two years and five years being mentioned as potential discount-eligible periods.

Hafferman supports a second proposal, which would exempt any project from road-impact fees if its preliminary plat was approved between July 1, 2004, and July 1, 2009.

Preliminary plats were granted after July 1, 2004, to Glacier Town Center's main outdoor shopping complex, Hutton Ranch Plaza, Spring Prairie Center and 1,645 homes that include northern Kalispell's Silverbrook Estates project. • One or two options will be presented on how new projects could be given credit on road-related work that is above what would be paid with impact fees.

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