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lakeland city commission

Panel Passes New-Home Impact Fee Hikes

Officials increase levies for parks and recreation, police and fire services.

By [Diane Lacey Allen](#)
The Ledger

LAKELAND | On the heels of property tax reform and a failed attempt for a special tax for recreation, Lakeland will get more money for parks from people who build new homes.

Lakeland city commissioners voted unanimously Monday to hike impact fees.

They increased the fees for parks and recreation along with those for police and fire services.

The only public outcry was from the Polk County Builders Association. The group opposed the formula that raised the parks impact fee for a single-family home from \$904 to \$2,578.

The PCBA, which historically has rallied opposition to various impact fees in the city and Polk County, did not argue against increasing fire or police impact fees. The fire impact fee will go from \$175 to \$339 for a single-family home, while the police impact fee will increase from \$177 to \$574.

George Lindsey, speaking for the builders and apologizing for objecting late in the process, described impact-fee calculations as an "art, not a science."

He asked the commission to reconsider part of the reasoning behind the impact fee for parks, saying that its estimate of \$120,000 for an acre of park land was too high.

"At the end of the day, you have to ask if this will pass the smell test," Lindsey said.

Lindsey suggested that the city buy property for parks during off times and create a land bank to avoid the high cost of recreation complexes.

Commissioner Edie Yates reminded Lindsey that the city had already tried to dedicate funding for parks and recreation by proposing a municipal special taxing unit. She said the public made it clear they didn't want to go the MSTU route.

"That forces us to buy land at a premium," Yates said.

Without an MSTU and with tight budgets from property tax reform, Lakeland has fewer options for neighborhood parks and recreation complexes.

Jim Studiale, director of community development, said that to build neighborhood parks, the city has to find land near neighborhoods, where the price is higher. He said the new impact fee for parks was about 85 percent of the full fee recommended by a study.

Mayor Buddy Fletcher said that buying land before people build can also be risky if development doesn't follow and the city has to carry the debt.

Commissioner Gow Fields told Lindsey that relying on impact fees to buy park land means the city has to wait for new construction for funds, which puts park purchases behind the curve.

"That puts us buying when you're buying and that's not going to give us the lowest price," Fields said.

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