

Impact fees on the way

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MONTROSE — With residential impact fees set to go into effect Jan. 1, commissioners now must decide at what phase to collect them.

The Montrose County Commissioners will discuss and possibly decide at a Dec. 3 meeting whether to assess the fees at the subdivision phase or construction phase of new development.

"The question is when we will collect it — at the development stage, building stage or both," Commissioner Bill Patterson said. "It doesn't have to be one or the other."

Impact fees for new residential construction — \$3,480 for new single-family homes and \$2,440 for new multi-family units — were approved in October. The money will go to offset growth's effect on the county road and bridge department.

Impact fees only apply to new development and can only be used for capital costs, not maintenance. The idea is that growth places increased demands on public infrastructure, so it should help foot the bill.

"We know we're going to collect them," Land Use Director Steve White said. "The general feeling we're hearing is that splitting the two — half at the subdivision phase and half at the building permit phase — is what sounds best to people."

White and County Engineer Brian Wilson voiced concerns at a Nov. 13 an impact-fee informational forum that drew few attendees. They said if impact fees were collected at the time building permits were issued, this might not adequately address the impact on roads during the construction phase.

White said told the Daily Press a 50-50 split of fees would help the county strike a balance. "If the year is slow in subdivisions and it's a better year in building, we're still collecting fees because impact is still happening," White said.

If impact fees are collected only when a building permit is issued, it's too late to address the impact on roads, he added. "You (would) have to wait until a building goes in. The damage has been done. Impact fees are for infrastructure and it makes sense to prepare for the impact."

Patterson said impact is "twofold."

"One impact is construction traffic during the building of the subdivision and then when they actually build homes," he said. "Your true impact is people moving in and increasing demand on the infrastructure we already have. In order to maintain a level of service, we have to improve the infrastructure."

The commissioners will also consider whether to approve additional impact fees for residential development Dec. 3. The additional fees would be \$496 for law enforcement, \$360 for administration, \$191 for Health and Human Services and \$106 for the fairgrounds.

If approved, the impact fee for single-family residential development would be \$4,633. For multi-family residential development, the impact fee would be \$3,593.

Not all development impacts all services in the same way and the county has not yet implemented impact fees for commercial development.

"We're focusing first on residential. Residential is the primary impact in the county. Most of the commercial development occurs in the city, not the county," Patterson said.

He said the county needed to keep economic development in mind when considering commercial impact fees.

"We've got a lot of everything except jobs. From an economic development standpoint, we quite often encourage businesses to move here. If impact fees are discouraging them, should we perhaps take a look at not having impact fees on commercial property?"

Patterson said that kind of consideration would have to include guarantees concerning the number of jobs a company could bring into the area.