

Park impact fee questions plague Cheney council

By DAVID TELLER

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Cheney City Council's discussion Tuesday evening about park impact fees ground to a halt after more questions surfaced regarding how fees would be assessed, whether they could be paid at the time a building permit was issued and providing developers an on site credit for parks built on their land.

Local developer Steve Emtman asked city officials and council members why park impact fees are being rushed through when the building code hasn't been updated since 1986.

Community development director Brian Jennings responded by saying the comprehensive plan is a foundation that will dictate the city's growth for the next 20 years. Codes can be changed as needed but they are based on the comprehensive plan.

Parks and recreation director Paul Simmons added that the changes are being proposed because the current policy is not thorough enough.

Emtman, owner of the Terra Vista subdivision in east Cheney is frustrated by the city code as many of his plans have been continually pushed back. He said the only thing he can really build is a single-family lot.

Emtman said he supports parks and is not opposed to the fee. In fact, he said he has \$500,000 invested in a three-quarter-mile trail park at Terra Vista. He added that he became more frustrated when he discovered he was not informed that the county accepted Cheney extending its growth boundary last December. He said he wants to build townhouses on his land with open space and smaller lots but has struggled with code set backs.

"You can get it done in the county, but you can't get it done in the city of Cheney," Emtman said after the council meeting.

In other news, after hearing a presentation from City Administrator Arlene Fisher the City Council postponed voting on the proposed business license fees ordinance after questions about licenses being tied to the permitting process and tracking sales tax came up.

Fisher said the purpose of the license fee is to know what is going on with businesses but also about educating people about laws and guidelines. Currently there is no business license required in Cheney.

"The city is a big player in economic development," she said.

Cheney Police Chief Jeff Sale said another purpose is to know who is selling what in town and controlling what they do, referring to door-to-door peddlers and the possibility of running a scam in the city.

"We don't have anything that controls that kind of thing coming into town," Sale said.

Cheney Fire Chief Mike Winter said the fee gives the city a look at businesses coming to the area. He said a common problem he encounters when he discovers violations centers around the question of "Why didn't somebody tell me about this?"

Since July 1, 2008, Fisher said 318 companies have transacted business in Cheney, which equates to more than \$24 million in lost revenue. She said what the city has assessed for the third quarter in 2008 is only \$11,600.

Though the City Council sets the fee, Fisher recommends \$15 in 2010 and \$30 in 2011.

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