

The News Tribune

Pasco schools seek developer impact fee

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PASCO -- The Pasco School District is hoping to get developers to agree to its efforts to have new subdivisions help pay for the new students they will add to already-packed schools.

The district wants Pasco to require the developer of Columbia Villas, a proposed 50-duplex subdivision, to pay a mitigation fee for the estimated 59 students the project likely will bring.

The request is part of the district's efforts to find ways to keep up with the astronomical growth in student population. The district has been adding an average of 700 students each year during the past decade.

Pasco schools, with about 15,000 students, are overflowing into portable buildings, and the district expects to reach almost 21,000 students in the next five years.

The district already has asked the city and county to adopt an impact fee of \$6,012 per single-family home and \$5,572 per apartment unit.

But Pasco City Council members and Franklin County commissioners haven't agreed yet.

Mitigation fees can be requested when projects go through the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and platting process. The district then must ask individually for the fee from each subdivision.

Impact fees are different. They are created by an ordinance and apply to any new subdivision.

Pasco City Manager Gary Crutchfield expects the council will be debating the impact fee issue at its first workshop meeting in July.

A council committee has been studying the issue with district officials and says it's time to bring a report to the full council, he said.

So while the city debates whether to create an impact fee ordinance, the school district's only alternative is to seek the mitigation fee request through the SEPA process, said John Morgan, the school district's executive director of operations.

The district hasn't asked for a specific amount from the Columbia Villas, but instead hopes to reach an agreement with the developer, he said.

To date, Big Creek Land Company of Idaho has filed a pre-plat application for the project, said Pasco City Planner David McDonald.

The city planning commission plans a public hearing on the proposal at 7 p.m. Thursday at Pasco City Hall, 525 N. Third Ave.

Cliff Mort, one of the owners of Big Creek Land Company, could not be reached this week about the proposed development on 13 acres north of Sandifur Parkway and west of Road 76.

The project would hook onto Three Rivers Drive, McDonald said. Conditions likely would include extending Road 76. It would be next to Columbia Place, which also was developed by Mort.

The school district previously requested but then withdrew its request for mitigation fees for two small subdivisions, one in Pasco and one in Franklin County. Morgan told the county that the district said it was going to wait until April 1 before starting to ask for the fees.

In Franklin County, there has been one application for a 10-lot subdivision since April, said Jerrod MacPherson, county planning and building director.

EL & JH Ray Farms, owned by Ed Ray of Pasco, applied for the subdivision off of Columbia River Road. The school district and the developer came to an agreement, he said. But the county has yet to approve the application.

The impact fees could help pay for portable classrooms. In September, the district will be using 171 portables.

The district also is considering multi-track, year-round schools and double-shifting, to handle all the students, Morgan said.

The district wants to work with the city, county and developers to find a solution that will work for everyone, he said.

"Finding space is very critical at this stage," he said.

The Home Builders Association of Tri-Cities has contended that impact fees could drive away development from Pasco.

But Morgan said that's a common misconception. Other communities have passed impact fees and not seen development halt.

He argued, "People will not buy houses if there are not quality schools."

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