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Road-impact fees remain on the table

Published: Sunday, February 8, 2009 9:21 PM CST

The Daily Inter Lake

Road-impact scenarios will be chewed over tonight at a Kalispell City Council workshop session on road-impact fees.

No votes will be legally allowed at the 7 p.m. session.

However, observers and council members should be able to get a feel for what scenarios that a council majority might approve.

An impact fee is a one-time charge on a new home or commercial building that is built in or annexed into Kalispell. Its purpose is to help the city pay for the extra capital costs of serving that structure.

The impact fee on a new single-family home would be \$928. But major retail projects — likely to create lots of traffic — can expect to pay tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The huge Glacier Town Center project by Wolford Development might pay \$6 million to \$7 million spread across the next 15 to 25 years —assuming all of the planned stores and homes actually materialize.

An apparent majority of the council wants to trim the fees. But there's no consensus on how.

Tonight, the council expects to:

n Look at a proposal by Council Member Bob Hafferman to exempt any project from road-impact fees if its preliminary plat was approved between July 1, 2004, and July 1, 2009.

The city's annual annexation report shows that 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 — which would exempt all these projects.

Wolford Development wants the city to drop all plans for road-impact fees. Hutton Ranch and Spring Prairie developers have said that some road-impact fees are acceptable, but the current proposals are too high.

n Look at what would happen if five or six projects are removed from the 10 proposed street upgrades that would receive money from road-impact fees.

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 EN 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.

n Ponder how Kalispell's proposed fees stack up to the same fees in Bozeman and Missoula.

In this comparison — since the year 2000 — Kalispell's population has grown by 43 percent to 20,000, Missoula's population has grown by 18 percent to 67,000, and Bozeman's has grown by 38 percent to almost 38,000.

Kalispell's fees are less than Bozeman's and higher than Missoula's, which uses a different methodology, according to a city staff report.

Because malls tend to be huge and complex, no comparisons could be made among the three cities.

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