



Salem sets third hearing on impact fee changes Tuesday

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SALEM — The third public hearing to discuss controversial changes to the town's road impact fee system will be held on Tuesday.

The Planning Board is looking to change the system used to determine the road impact fees developers pay, to expand the area where they apply from two highway corridors to the entire town, and to increase the fee to take inflation into account.

But local developers have objected to the proposed changes because of the dramatic cost increases, claiming it would deter prospective investors from developing in Salem. Some projects would see as much as an eightfold increase in impact fees.

The Planning Board has delayed making a decision on the new plan at two previous public hearings held in May and July.

"The Planning Board is trying to do two things — impose an impact fee system on a town-wide basis, which is a tremendous expansion of the geographic area, and then increase the fees dramatically themselves," said Chris Goodnow, of Goodnow Real Estate Services.

The current road impact fee, a one-time charge paid by the developer to the town, applies only to development along Route 28 and around Interstate 93's Exit 2. It hasn't been adjusted to take into account inflation since 1994. Money from the impact fees can be used by the town for road improvements and traffic mitigation.

Developers first objected to the proposed impact fee changes at the May hearing. In response, Martin Kennedy, the town's consultant for the fee overhaul, suggested a 25 percent across-the-board reduction of the increases. A memo written by Kennedy to the town last week stated that the proposed increase could now be reduced by 29 percent instead of 25 percent.

Goodnow said he would like the Planning Board to consider imposing only the expansion of the impact fees, and wait until the economy improves to revisit a possible increase to the fee itself.

"Given the current economic climate, if they broke this up into pieces, that would give them the ability to take another look at the rates themselves in better economic times," he said.

Town planner Ross Moldoff said Kennedy will address questions brought forward by the Planning Board at the last public hearing, and the board could make a decision at Tuesday's hearing.

The hearing will take place at 7 p.m. in the Knightly Meeting Room at Town Hall.

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