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## School district to start charging impact fees

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By Laura Geggel

To help pay for a proposed expansion at the elementary and high school levels, the Snoqualmie Valley School Board gave the go-ahead for the district to collect impact fees at the June 25 school board meeting.

The plans will become more concrete this fall, when the Long Term Facilities Planning Committee makes a recommendation to the school board about how to respond to the district's growing student base.

At the school board meeting, the board approved the 2009 Capital Facilities Plan, a six-year plan detailing the expansion of Snoqualmie Valley schools. If the King County Council approves the fees, the district will begin collecting them in 2010.

Impact fees for a single-family residence will cost \$2,687 and a multi-family residence will cost \$1,032.

Impact fees are administered to new residential developments to help fund school district capital projects. The fees, which are often passed onto the homeowner, finance growth-related projects — like buying land for a proposed school, purchasing portables or building a new school.

Impact fees cannot be used to refurbish current school facilities. Nor can impact fees cover the entire cost of a new facility. School bonds, which tax the school's voting base, fund other growth-related projects. Bond money can finance school refurbishment, such as replacing a worn roof or an outdated heating system.

For instance, the school district has 46 portable classrooms. By 2012, it plans to place 12 additional portables at the high school and six at the elementary level. Some of these portables could be supplemented by impact fees.

Snoqualmie Valley began implementing impact fees in 1993, shortly after the State Growth Management Act of 1990 and the King County Impact Fee Ordinance of 1991. It did not charge any impact fees during the 2009 calendar year.

With money from impact fees, schools can work to keep low class sizes. By 2014, Snoqualmie Valley schools are predicted to exceed total capacity by 184 at the elementary level. The high school may have as many as 674 students over capacity in 2014, even with the 12 new portables it is set to receive this fall.

With the economy still struggling, it may be some time before developments spring up around the Valley.

“We can go through this whole process and set a fee, but if nobody builds anything, we won't collect anything,” said Ron Ellis, business director for the school district.

Many of Snoqualmie's new developments have already acquired the necessary permits, meaning the 2010 impact fee would not affect them. In North Bend, the impact fees could affect two potential developments. North Bend resident Byron Moore is affiliated with a group that could build as many as 100 new houses in North Bend.

“I expected the fees and I think they're reasonable for the district to charge,” said Moore, who grew up in North Bend and attended Snoqualmie Valley schools himself.

John Day of John Day Homes Inc. disagreed. His company plans to build more than 60 homes in the North Bend area.

“Simply put, any impact fees decrease the underlying value of residential property and decrease the affordability of housing,” Day said. “Especially when we're trying to create affordable housing with our cottage development ‘Ranger Station.’ It is very possible that all of the layers of fees could make affordability unattainable.”

But Ellis said the fees were necessary to make room for more students.

“At least by going through this process we have a fee on the books, so if someone goes through this, we collect some impact fee,” Ellis said.

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