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Sequim considers fees on residential developers

By Diane Urbani de la Paz
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SEQUIM -- Tennis courts at Carrie Blake Park: \$300,000.

Soccer and softball fields on 12 acres just north of the park: \$471,500.

"Urban pathways and bikeways" including the next phase of the Olympic Discovery Trail: \$2.7 million.

A 45-acre wildlife refuge, with parking lot, along U.S. Highway 101 west of Happy Valley Road: \$1.08 million.

All this and more is on the parks and trails on Sequim's 2009-2014 wish list.

How to pay for such amenities?

The Sequim City Council is poised to impose a park impact fee on builders of houses, condominiums and apartments.

On Monday night, the council held a public hearing on an impact-fee study just completed by the Henderson Group, a Redmond consultant the city hired last fall.

The council will continue the public hearing on the fees and possibly adopt them at its next meeting at 6 p.m. Jan. 26 in the Transit Center, 190 W. Cedar St.

Henderson's report on park impact fees, available on the city's Web site, www.ci.sequim.wa.us, lists \$5.726 million in hoped-for improvements to Sequim parks and trails.

Real estate excise taxes and grants could pay for a small portion, but developers' fees would cover some \$4.385 million in work, said the Henderson Group's Randy Young.

Young recommended charging the fees for new residential development only and exempting remodeling projects and commercial development.

The costs would be steep for each new home.

The builder of a single-family house would pay a \$3,950 park impact fee, while each new condo or apartment would generate \$4,258 for the city parks.

Impact fees are known as a way to make growth pay for growth and to ensure that a town like Sequim provides "levels of service" -- as in play spaces and decent roads -- for its swelling population.

In an interview, Young said dozens of Washington cities are using park-impact fees. The amount Sequim may charge would be in the top third, he added.

Don Hall, a member of the Sequim Citizens' Park Advisory Board, said he's in favor of the proposed fees.

Among the improvements he'd like to see: better care of the totem pole and dugout canoe at Pioneer Park, 387 E. Washington St.

The park's grassy expanse, he added, is "an ideal place, I think, for lawn bowling."

Young emphasized that impact fees could turn Sequim's project list into a realistic plan. "This is a lot farther from the classic 'wish list,'" he said.

Public safety fee

Also on Monday night, the council voted unanimously to pay the Henderson Group up to \$119,719 to conduct another study, this time of a traffic/public safety impact fee.

That charge, also to be imposed on developers, would generate money for roads and improved police facilities -- something Sequim Police Chief Robert Spinks has long cried out for.

Issaquah is one Western Washington city with a police impact fee, Young said.

When asked how much this city might charge, Young said the range across Washington is wide: from \$100 per new house to more than \$10,000. He couldn't estimate what Sequim's fee might be.

City Planning Director Dennis Lefevre predicted that if the City Council approves the park- and traffic-impact fees, both could be in place by spring.

And though developers aren't quite beating a path to Sequim the way they were in 2006 and 2007, the Henderson Group's park-impact fee report projects continued population growth of 5,412.

And by 2014, the report states, Sequim is expected to be home to 7,430 people.

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