

St. Tammany Parish Council lowers impact fees on developers

By [Robert Rhoden, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

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Effective immediately, developers in St. Tammany Parish will pay significantly lower impact fees to parish government to offset the effects their projects have on drainage and traffic. After a brief discussion and a few questions from the public, the [Parish Council](#) voted 11-0, with three members absent, Thursday night to lower the fees that have been in effect since 2005.

Nearly all of the impact fees homebuilders and other developers pay were reduced as recommended by Duncan Associates of Austin, Texas, which came up with the original amount of the fees when St. Tammany in 2005 became the first parish in the state to require such payments from developers.

Fees on each single family home, for instance, go from \$3,077 to \$2,191, a reduction of about 29 percent. Fees on multifamily dwellings drop from \$1,487 to \$1,039 per unit, a 30-percent decrease.

Mandeville area resident Carlo Hernandez and Sandra Slifer, president of the League of Women Voters of St. Tammany, both told the council they wanted to see a copy of the firm's study on which the new fees were based. Dealing with growth and the associated costs to government is "a problem for many governments across the country," Slifer said. "Are we really capturing the costs?"

Hernandez asked the council to postpone a vote for a month.

Councilman Richard Tanner, however, pushed for a vote, noting that the ordinance was initially put [on the agenda in November](#). "We got people waiting to build homes and what have you," he said.

The vote was recorded, and Planning Director Sidney Fontenot said he would share Duncan Associates' study with any members of the public who wanted to see it.

He said the study considered that the amount of traffic generated by nearly all types of development is down compared to 2005 and that the cost of building roads and making drainage improvements also is less expensive due to the economy.

Since 2005, fees have been put into separate accounts and used to build new roads, improve highways and make drainage improvements, such as large retention ponds. The fees have generated about \$7.5 million per year for roads and \$7.3 million for drainage.

The impact fee law called for periodic review of the charges, and the reduction is based on a complicated formula taking into account such things as road and drainage needs, the number of vehicles and miles traveled on major roads, and the amount of development in the parish, Chief Administrative Officer Bill Oiler has said previously.

On the commercial side, the revised ordinance creates some new classifications, but nearly all call for reduced charges.

The fees for retail projects, for example, would go from \$3,003 to \$2,401 per 1,000 square feet.

Office space would move from \$3,343 to \$2,798 per 1,000 square feet.

Institutional developments would drop from \$3,343 to \$1,265 per 1,000 square feet.

Only developers of mobile home parks would see an increase. Their fees would rise from \$573 to \$983 per pad.

Susan Meyer, president of the St. Tammany/Washington Parishes Home Builders Association, said last month that reducing the fees would be "good for business."

Oiler has said he did not know how much money the reduced fees would generate, as it would depend on the amount of residential and commercial building the parish sees.

Parish officials said the lower fees proposed by Duncan Associates result from numerous factors, including the many major road and drainage projects the parish has completed in recent years, fewer vehicles and miles traveled on major roads because of high gasoline costs, the lower cost of construction due to the economy, as well as a general slowdown in home and commercial development.

Under the amended ordinance, the fees apply to commercial and residential development in unincorporated areas south of the urban growth boundary line, which runs east-west across the parish just north of Pearl River, Abita Springs and Covington. Above that line, the fees apply to all commercial developments but only those residential projects of such size that they require Planning Commission approval.