

# Times-Standard

## Supervisors agree to fire impact fee in concept

Jessie Faulkner/The Times-Standard

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EUREKA -- Humboldt No. 1 Fire Protection District will be proceeding with plans for its one-time development impact fee after getting a conceptual nod from the supervisors this week.

By state law, the fire district does not have the legal authority to enact such a fee, but supervisors may do so on behalf of special districts, Humboldt No. 1 Fire Protection District Chief Glenn Ziemer told the board.

The question before the board Tuesday was whether Humboldt County's supervisors were willing to conceptually approve the fee, estimated at \$701 for new single family residences. With that conceptual support, fire district officials can return with an implementation ordinance.

If the fee is ultimately approved, the district plans to use the revenues to partially cover the cost of building and equipping a new fire house in Cutten.

The 1995 Eureka Community Plan, Ziemer said, estimated the area would see an increase of 5,500 to 6,000 homes. But, with the possibility that the county's general plan update could provide incentives for more dense housing developments, that could result in 7,000 to 9,000 units, he said, essentially doubling the current population of the area.

The fly in the soup for at least two of the supervisors was the fact that the county is in the process of drafting its own comprehensive fee to

cover the cost of infrastructure.

Fourth District Supervisor Bonnie Neely and 3rd District Supervisor John Woolley expressed concern that giving a conceptual nod to the fire district's fee in advance of unveiling the county's own fee proposal would mean too much in fees.

Woolley moved to direct county staff to consider the Humboldt No. 1 Fire Protection District fee in the county's total impact fee and report back to the board no later than nine months. In the event that the details of the county's fee weren't worked out within that timeframe, the board would again consider the fire district's proposal.

The supervisors voted down the proposal 2-3, with 5th District Supervisor Jill Geist, 1st District Supervisor Jimmy Smith and 2nd District Supervisor Johanna Rodoni opposed.

The crux for Ziemer is that the district first approached the county's Public Works Department two years ago and deferred going forward until the county completed plans for its own fee.

"We're approaching two years since that conversation," he said. "We tried to talk to Community Development Services (Department) and never heard a word -- until after the final report. ... It's discouraging."

The supervisors made it clear that public works was not at fault for the delay in finalizing the county's fee plan, given the department's heavy workload.

The majority of the public comments on the issue supported the fire district's proposed fee and urged the supervisor to proceed as requested.

Bob Higgons of the Humboldt Association of Realtors said they were not happy to see the fee

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proposal but reviewed the district's study and concluded it was justifiable.

Northern California Association of Homebuilders representative Julie Williams agreed and urged the board to conceptually agree to the requested fee.

"We feel the fire district has done its job," she said.

Ultimately, a majority of the supervisors agreed.

Smith moved two of the staff recommendations -- adoption of a development impact fee for the fire district and directing the county counsel to explore the legality of enacting the fee on behalf of the district.

Rodoni, Geist and Smith supported the motion, Neely and Woolley opposed it.

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