



Supervisors approve big developer fee cut

By Chris Nichols • U-T

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Developers in San Diego County's backcountry received a large boost this week when the Board of Supervisors drastically cut a set of fees some blame for stymieing rural development.

With Wednesday's unanimous vote, Board Chairman Ron Roberts said the board had corrected "one of the biggest mistakes we have ever made," referring to its approval of the transportation impact fee in 2005.

"I've been waiting a long time for this. I'm delighted," Roberts added at the board's meeting in downtown San Diego, noting he was the sole supervisor to initially oppose the fees.

The fees pay for roads and infrastructure necessary to support new development. The fee rates, which have been a source of pointed criticism from building industry leaders, were set to pay for \$900 million of expected road improvements.

County officials now say \$353 million is needed to support growth because the county's newly approved General Plan favors compact, town-center development in rural communities. And it severely limits growth in areas without adequate road, water and sewer service.

The board's action will reduce by 80 percent the fee for commercial projects, from \$12.31 per square foot to \$2.52 per square foot. The fee for industrial projects would drop 75 percent, from \$4.55 per square foot to \$1.12 per square foot.

And the fee per residential unit would be cut nearly in half, or 46 percent, from \$6,725 to \$3,617.

Roberts said the fee caused the county to lose out on considerable tax revenue because developers chose to build commercial centers within city limits, sometimes right next to the unincorporated areas.

Supervisor Pam Slater-Price asked how the county's road and infrastructure funds would be affected should the board approve some large development projects that don't fit with the General Plan's compact-growth rules.

Richard Crompton, the county's public works director, responded that the board would have to decide, when considering such projects, whether to charge the individual developer with those traffic improvement costs or raise the traffic fee rates for everyone.

Reducing the developer fees does not reduce maintenance funds for county roads. The developer fees pay for roads, ramps and signals necessary to accommodate traffic from new subdivisions or shopping malls, not repairs of existing and unrelated roads.

The board must conduct a second reading of the fee changes on Oct. 31.

The new rates are expected to go into effect on Jan. 2.

"The fee we had before was a real killer," added Supervisor Greg Cox, calling the new fee rates "fair and reasonable."

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