Residents, officials want more time to mull over proposed impact fees

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By Jenifer Gee (jgee@ledger-dispatch.com)

An hour-and-a-half public hearing with most attendees stating they did not have enough time to review the information at hand led the Sutter Creek City Council to continue a public hearing on a matter time sensitive to the proposed Gold Rush Ranch and Golf Course Resort.

On Monday night staff presented to the council a Capital Facilities Fee Nexus study, which is a study that will develop the city's fee program for future developments. The study determines separate impact fees, to be charged to new development and areas annexed into the city, for various capital facilities including police, fire, city hall, historical facilities and other areas.

This study proposed that the fee per unit for a residential unit would be $3,787.

The study, advertised and available for the past 30 days, came as a surprise to some of the attendees in the audience, including local developers. As a result, several attendees asked the council for more time to look over the document so they could have their questions answered.

Some of the crowd and council's concerns centered around whether or not developers were being charged a fair share, what impact the fees would have to already existing citizens, and other questions.

The council was asked to approve the first reading, direct staff and the consultant to answer unanswered questions, and include those in the final report to be approved at a second reading in two weeks.

Councilmember Tim Murphy said he, too, was uncomfortable approving a first reading because his page-long list of questions had not all been answered.

In the end, the council brought an almost two-hour conversation to an end by voting unanimously to continue the public hearing until the council's next meeting Jan. 22.

Council and attendees went on a tangent on an issue that has dogged the city and the Amador County Transportation Commission for years during a report from ACTC Executive Director Charles Field.

The vacant lot on the corner of Ridge Road and Highway 49 has remained vacant for years, with city officials and developers saying that the main problem rests in the lack of access into the site. The city has proposed a left hand turn lane off Ridge Road into the development but that possibility is now being further scrutinized by the state Department of Transportation.

Sutter Creek resident and developer Dennis Griffin, who previously owned the property, asked Field point blank if he supports the left hand turn lane.

Field responded by saying he would remain in the middle. "When I say I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place, I understand the city's place - it's been made very clear to me by the city manager several times - on the other hand our (ACTC) job is to maintain safety and traffic circulation," Field said, explaining that Caltrans engineers are now saying the left hand turn may not be safe even with a speed limit reduction.

Eventually, Field got what he came for: an approval of the regional mitigation fee annual report and expenditure of funds. The fee remains the same at $304 per trip in, which is a fee charged to every city.

In other news, Councilmember Gary Wooten was elected as the city's new mayor for 2008 and kept Mayor Pro Tem Bill Hepworth at his post for another year.

Wooten told the council and audience that he is ready for the responsibilities that come with being mayor.

"I do realize how important it is being the mayor of Sutter Creek," Wooten said. "With all of the important decisions coming up this

Sutter Creek Councilman Brent Parsons, right, presents Mayor Pro Tem Bill Hepworth with a resolution and plaque of appreciation for his dedication to the beautification and mural projects.

Photo by: Jenifer Gee

Sutter Creek Councilman Tim Murphy presents Sutter Creek resident Toni Linde with a resolution honoring her work on the Christmas Light Parade that light up Main Street last month.

Photo by: Jenifer Gee

year, hopefully I'll do a good job."

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