

# Warrenton may hike building charges for contractors

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WARRENTON — System development charges, costs tacked on to the price of a building permit within the city, are set to increase in the next fiscal year – one year after they were adopted by the Warrenton City Commission to pay for increased strain on the water, sewer, stormwater and transportation resources.

That could mean hundreds of thousands of dollars for the city if the proposed Walmart store comes to the North Coast, or any other large retailers.

It could also mean higher costs in a tough economy for those hoping to build a single-family home.

But Commissioner Mark Baldwin, who works in the building industry, asked for even higher increases than City Manager Kurt Fritsch had proposed Tuesday night, commenting that even an extra \$5,000 is not going to deter people from building a home.

He said existing homeowners should not have to pay for the growth coming to the community by new home builders.

City staff will bring back three options to the next Warrenton City Commission meeting June 25 for the commission to discuss and choose from before an increase is adopted.

“I’m a general contractor,” Baldwin said. “The clientele that I’ve worked with that are building new houses, cost really hasn’t ever seemed to be an issue. And \$3,500 over a 30-year term, with interest, comes down to about \$15 a year. It’s less that they’re willing to spend on their tile in their bathroom. So we have a nice city, we’re growing, we have good things going on, we have good schools, we have good people here. This is where people want to be. That extra \$3,550 or \$3,000 I don’t think is going to sway them. ...

“I still believe that if you want to be a part of our community, you should pay your part.”

The rates vary from single-family homes up to commercial developments. For the average single-family home, the city adopted a \$2,000 system development charge rate – \$744 for water, \$692 for sewer, \$433 for transportation and \$131 for stormwater.

“\$131 right now is capped based upon the projects we have listed out in our system development charge methodology and our planning,” Fritsch said.

Fritsch introduced a starting point for an additional \$1,000 increase, setting aside \$1,000 for water, \$1,000 for sewer, \$619 for transportation, \$131 for stormwater and \$250 for parks.

“That’s in our plan,” Fritsch said of the parks charge, “but we did not adopt it last time.”

Fritsch said some may perceive his proposal as an example of him being “willy nilly” trying to up rates every year, but he cautioned that the rates were initially suggested at \$5,000 for the average single-family home but that proposal was turned down by the commission, in favor of a slower implemented system, to be reviewed every year.

It was then that Baldwin suggested going for \$3,550 at least but was not opposed to going for the full \$5,000 now.

“I’d personally like to see parks go from \$250 to \$500, stormwater from \$131 to \$350, I think both of those are important,” Baldwin said. “I’d like to see transportation go up to an even \$700. If my math is correct, that will put that at \$3,550 and if you can come up with justification for more than that, I’m definitely willing to listen.”

Mayor Mark Kujala agreed, saying he felt stormwater was one of the city’s strongest issues and is “woefully undervalued” for new development. It was suggested a \$3,000, \$4,000 and \$5,000 proposal be brought to the next meeting.

“In water and sewer in particular, if we get the SDCs and continue to get them in increasing amounts, a lot of it comes from the big boxes and commercial developers. That’s where the big dollars are,” Fritsch said. “They go a long way servicing the debt that we’ve already incurred or expansion of those plans, improvements of those plans in water and sewer, and the projects that we’re building without SDCs today. So they do and will have a very positive impact on this community.”