

## Archives Article View

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### Largo Commission forges ahead with impact fees

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LARGO – City commissioners have been in agreement that the moratorium on parkland and recreation facilities impact fees needs to be lifted. The question has been how much can they charge before scaring off developers.

City leaders took a step toward answering that question during a special meeting of the City Commission on Sept. 13.

After listening to concerns from the local business community and then examining – and reexamining – the numbers, officials voted 6-0 on first reading to charge 50 percent of the rates initially proposed by consultants Tindale Oliver, meaning that building a new single-family home will cost \$2,046, a multifamily unit will cost \$1,319 and a mobile home will cost \$1,124.

“The discussions of Future Focus and our Community Conversations and the importance of parkland and facilities on parkland are just so important to the citizens,” Commissioner John Carroll said. “I don’t want to price ourselves out of the market but I think it’s time to reinstitute the parkland fee.”

Commissioners also voted 6-0, with Samantha Fenger absent, to phase in the fee for the first year so developers wouldn’t get sticker shock and take their business elsewhere.

Therefore, beginning Jan. 1, the fees will be half of the aforementioned amounts and will increase to the adopted rate beginning Jan. 1, 2018.

In 2012, the City Commission attempted to stimulate development by instituting a moratorium on the fees, which are one-time charges to new development designed to fund the purchase of future parkland or the construction and expansion of recreational facilities.

The move seemed to have helped, as several multifamily complexes have chosen Largo as their home. Business leaders were concerned, however, that developments, such as the recently opened Boulevard Apartments on Seminole Boulevard, may not have come to fruition if the fees the consultants suggested were in place.

At a previous work session, Community Development Director Carol Stricklin said the Boulevard Apartments would’ve had to pay \$685,620 for its 260 units.

Initial figures provided by consultants also showed that Largo would be charging the most for impact fees in Pinellas County – by far.

“Our economic development committee was not against lifting the moratorium,” said Tom Morrisette, president of the Central Pinellas Chamber of Commerce based in Largo. “It was the figures they were against. They were afraid we were going to lose our competitiveness, and we are doing well now and we don’t want to see that happen.”

The planning board, along with Mayor Woody Brown and commissioners Curtis Holmes and Jamie

Robinson, agreed with those concerns. The board voted to recommend denying the ordinance, but commissioners sought middle ground by pursuing a discounted rate that was more competitive with nearby cities.

Commissioners also said they didn't want to give up on the fees because they wanted to make sure funds were available to seize opportunities, such as a \$1.3 million land purchase made in July. The money paid for three parcels of land east of U.S. 19 at Roosevelt Boulevard and 62nd Street North for use as a park and trailhead along the future Duke Energy Trail.

"When land does become available, you need to be able to act on it," said Joan Byrne, director of recreation, parks and arts. "If we have to wait until the next budget year to budget for it, it'll be gone."

Byrne also said the fees would help portions of the city that are in need of improvements.

"The southeastern part of the city is really absent of almost any kind of recreational or park facility, so there are plenty of parts of the city that have great inequities when it comes to park and rec facilities," she said.

Commissioners easily agreed about a need for the fees, but picking the right dollar figures proved to be anything but easy.

Holmes' initial motion to discount the rates 50 percent didn't receive a second, and Commissioner Michael Smith's motion to adopt the rate at 65 percent was denied 2-4. Holmes then made a second attempt at the 50 percent mark, and, after having a second look at the numbers, the commission voted in favor of the rate.

Brown said the consultants could've helped clear up the confusion from outset.

"I really wish the consultant would've done some consulting instead of just doing some math."

A second and final reading hearing is scheduled for Sept. 20.

## By the numbers

Impact fees are one-time charges to new development designed to fund the purchase of future parkland or the construction and expansion of rec facilities. Below are the figures commissioners settled on.

\$2,046 - Single-family homes

\$1,319 - Multifamily units

\$1,124 - Mobile homes

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