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Park fees scaled back

Proposal takes some of the burden off homes being built in El Dorado Hills.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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Representatives of the building industry and El Dorado Hills Community Services District say they are nearing accord on park impact fees for new development.

The district board last week reviewed an updated study recommending a reduction in residential fees approved by the board in November while adding a fee for nonresidential construction.

"We're very pleased with the direction this is going," John Costa, legislative advocate for the North State Building Industry Association, said in an interview Friday.

The cost estimate for park and recreation facilities needed to serve a community of nearly 58,000 in 2020 has been scaled back to \$103 million from \$131 million in the latest study, with new development's share of the cost reduced from about \$94 million to \$76.5 million.

The new proposal calls for an \$11,489 fee for new single-family homes in most of El Dorado Hills, \$3,910 less than the fee approved by the board in November.

Costa and local developers urged the district in November to postpone the fee adoption for further study, saying they questioned the park development and facilities costs used to justify increases that included a 118 percent jump in the fee for new single-family homes.

Though district board members adopted the fees, implementation requires the county Board of Supervisors' approval.

En route to the supervisors, the fee program was reviewed by the Planning Commission in January. The panel is charged with determining whether the program is consistent with the general plan, the county's blueprint for growth.

Commission members said they shared building industry concerns that the fees were excessive and ran counter to general plan goals to provide affordable housing. They directed district officials to respond to developers' questions.

The district has since met with a Building Industry Association panel, and the fee study was amended after determining it had failed to incorporate some changes made in the district's updated park master plan. The master plan and the fee program were adopted in November.

The study, for example, did not reflect a decision to reduce the size of a new administration building to 20,000 square feet from 30,000, said Wayne Lowery, district general manager.

For the new study, the recently completed skate park also was removed from park costs, and population estimates were modified.

The scope and cost of a planned aquatic center were revised, reducing the cost to about \$16.2 million, down about \$2.8 million from November.

The new fee study also includes a nearly 17 percent reduction in the estimated square footage costs for the aquatic center, community center and administration building.

Park development cost estimates have been reduced about 16 percent, but are still a point of contention. Building industry representatives maintain that the district's estimates are too high, "but we're using very real numbers from parks that we've built," Lowery said.

"We've received no correct estimates from our architects and engineers in the last five years," he said, adding that final costs have been 40 percent to 80 percent higher than projected.

Costa said Building Industry Association representatives are still studying the park cost estimates and comparing them with facilities constructed recently in other communities.

Park development in El Dorado Hills presents certain challenges, he acknowledged.

"They do have to monitor air quality for asbestos," Costa said, and the hilly terrain can boost development costs for new parks.

But Costa said he thinks the district's estimates are based on periods when construction costs spiked and do not reflect current costs. Also to be resolved, he said, is to what extent private recreation facilities reduce the impact on public facilities.

District officials and the building industry committee also agreed that nonresidential development should share in the cost.

"A percentage of office employees will use the parks, so they should pay part of their cost," Lowery said, noting that people who work in the community may eat their lunch in a local park or participate in sports leagues that use the district's ball fields.

Fees for nonresidential construction would be based on square footage, with \$1.26 per square foot proposed for new commercial development, \$1.62 for office space and 57 cents for industrial buildings.

The community services district board will continue discussion of the proposed fee program at its April 12 meeting.

The Planning Commission was scheduled to take up the matter again today, but Lowery said the district would request a continuance to April 26.

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Phone: (916) 321-1000

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Revised park impact fee proposed

Responding to building industry concerns, the El Dorado Hills Community Services District board is considering scaling back park impact fees approved in November for new residential construction and adding a fee for new nonresidential development. The fees are payable upon applying for a building permit.

El Dorado Hills Community Services District park impact fees

LAND USE	CURRENT FEE	FEES APPROVED	
		BY CSD <i>November 2006</i>	PROPOSED FEE <i>March 2007</i>
Residential <i>Per dwelling unit</i>			
Single family	\$7,073	\$15,399	\$11,489
Serrano*	\$2,906	\$5,355	\$3,768
Age-restricted	\$4,157	\$9,008	\$6,720
Multifamily	\$7,073	\$12,724	\$9,493
Mobile home	\$4,780	\$11,281	\$8,416
Nonresidential <i>Per square foot</i>			
Commercial	0	0	\$1.26
Office	0	0	\$1.62
Industrial	0	0	\$0.57

*Fees for homes in Serrano are less because the developer builds the parks in those neighborhoods

Source: El Dorado Hills Community Services District

Sacramento Bee/Olivia Nguyen