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Residents back hike in park impact fees

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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El Dorado Hills residents urged members of the community services district board last week to stand up to county officials to assure adequate parks and recreation facilities are available in the growing community.

The county Planning Commission has sent the district back to the drawing board twice over concerns that proposed park impact fee increases would further hinder efforts to provide affordable housing in the community.

But several residents said during the board's May 10 meeting that they feared scaling back the fee increase and planned facilities would shortchange current and future residents.

"I ask that you please hold firm. ... We want parks," Kimberly White told the board, complaining that the planning panel is yielding to developers and overlooking community needs.

The district board in November approved a master plan for about \$131 million in parks and recreational facilities to serve the approximately 58,000 residents expected by 2020. Board members also approved a park impact fee program to generate nearly \$94 million, the estimated cost of facilities needed to serve new development. Their recommended \$15,399 fee -- a 118 percent increase -- for new single-family homes in most of El Dorado Hills, drew objections from builders.

In January, the Planning Commission directed the district board to respond to developers' concerns about the fee increase.

In April, following meetings with industry representatives, the district presented a scaled-back master plan for projects with an estimated \$103 million price tag, a revised fee schedule calling for \$11,489 per single-family home, and a proposed fee for nonresidential development.

Dianna Hillyer, district planning director, said last week that the Planning Commission had asked the district to consider further reducing the proposed fee. She also noted that an ordinance amendment would be required to impose a park impact fee on nonresidential development.

Wayne Lowery, district general manager, said the Planning Commission also requested further information on how the district would fund an estimated \$26 million required to meet current residents' share of costs for master plan projects.

Hillyer said district staff members and developers now contemplate a fee of \$9,807 for new single-family homes, nearly a 39 percent increase over the current fee. That would generate approximately \$45.4 million for future parks and \$18.3 million for community centers, swimming pools and operations facilities, according to a district news release.

White said residents' wishes are being overlooked because many can't attend the Planning Commission's daytime meetings.

"On the other side, the building industry, they are paid to be here," White said. "We all have to realize this is our chance to make our community great."

Resident Rob Vomund said builders assume home buyers would be unwilling to pay a higher fee for parks and recreational facilities, yet developers and real estate agents always point out to prospective buyers where parks are to be built.

If fees aren't increased, he said, residents of new developments, like residents of many existing neighborhoods, will find themselves waiting years for parks because fees have not kept pace with

construction costs.

"This board is doing the best we can with the legal powers we have," director David Trapani said.

Lowery, the general manager, said park impact fees can be levied only by agencies such as cities and counties that control land use. He said the county in 1997 authorized the district to begin collecting park impact fees.

"Without the fee, we would be sorely pressed to build parks," Lowery said.

Hillyer said she would present the board with a revised fee proposal May 24, as well as a resolution stating the district's support for efforts to provide affordable housing. The goal, she said, is to get the fee proposal before the Planning Commission in June.

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