

# City increases development fees to help pay for more public parks

## Way of estimating costs will be revamped in 2008

**SAM TAYLOR**

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BELLINGHAM — Development fees that help pay for acquiring new park land were increased by City Council members Monday night in a 5-1 vote.

Councilwoman Barbara Ryan voted against the proposal, saying the increases were based on faulty math and assumptions of how much park land the city should be providing based on growth. Councilman Gene Knutson was absent from the meeting due to health problems.

Park impact fees were increased by more than \$916 for a single-family residence, and more than \$671 for apartments and condos.

The increase was devised by increasing the estimated value of the city's park land, rather than increasing the amount of money per housing unit that should be contributed to the system.

But the additional money is still estimated to leave a \$28.8 million funding gap for the parks system, said Paul Leuthold, Parks and Recreation Director. Current impact costs are about \$3,891 for a single-family residence and about \$2,851 for a condo or apartment.

Calling the level of service that the city is expected to provide for parks "unrealistic,"

Ryan said she would rather have city staff revamp the "existing level of service" number, which is used to determine how much park land per 1,000 residents is needed.

The entire council agreed that the level of service figures need to be looked at, but that can be done in 2008, when staff must revise the parks plan as required of them every six years.

"What we're doing tonight is a one-time correction based on property values," said Councilman John Watts.

Home prices will increase because of the fees, said Mary Dickinson of the Building Industry Association of Whatcom County.

Dickinson said it wasn't just the increase of a parks impact fee that increases prices but

the "myriad of fees layered upon one another."

Eric Hirst, vice chairman of the Mayor's Greenway Advisory Committee, encourage council members to significantly increase the fees developers pay toward the park system.

"We need to stop subsidies for growth," Hirst said.

Councilman Terry Borne-mann said he was concerned about the level of service being misstated by staff members, but that it was clear that the parks needed to be taken care of by the city and new parks are essential because of how many people are using them.

"Bellingham loves our parks," he said. "We're loving some of our parks to death."

Reach Sam Taylor at [sam.taylor@bellinghamherald.com](mailto:sam.taylor@bellinghamherald.com) or call 715-2263.