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News

Park fee increase to benefit District 6

By Monica Heger

The planning commission has taken a step toward securing more parkland for San Jose.

The planning commission this month agreed with the recommendation of the parks and recreation commission that the fees a developer pays for parks should be raised to reflect 2005 land values. Currently, developers pay fees that are set at 70 percent of 2001 land values.

The reevaluation of land values will mean more money for parks. Fees for a single-family house could increase by \$6,250 to \$20,250, depending on land values in the area. These park fees, paid by developers in-lieu of donating parkland, go toward park projects within the district of the proposed development.

Joe Bentley, president of the Shasta Hanchett Neighborhood Preservation Association, said that the park fees are particularly important to District 6 because of the high-density housing that is slated for the area. He said the amount of housing that is scheduled to be built reflects a 40 percent increase, and most of it is higher density.

"If you're not putting yards in those homes, you obviously need park space," Bentley said, "and we're not keeping up with it."

Helen Chapman, the chair of the parks and recreation commission, believes these adjustments are long overdue.

"For the last five years developers have been getting a very good deal," Chapman said. "It's just like a cost of living adjustment. Really, it's just bringing everything up to current levels."

Many neighborhood associations agree with Chapman and as a result formed an organization called the Coalition for a Livable San Jose (CalSJ). Kerri Hamilton,

the chair of CalSJ said the fee increases are important because of the disparity between current fees and land values.

"It's better to err on the side of more dirt," said Randi Kinman, president of the Burbank DelMonte neighborhood advisory committee, "because once the dirt's gone, you don't get any more dirt."

The commission also recommended that high-rises in the downtown core only pay 50 percent of the new fees until 2,500 units are occupied. They recommended that the city council research the feasibility of creating a permanent city position charged with seeking grant money for parks for low-income housing developments that are exempt from paying the fees.

Beverley Bryant, executive director of the Homebuilders Association of Northern California, asked for an update of the greenprint--an inventory of San Jose's park space--before the fees were increased. She also said that increases to projects already in the works could be detrimental to the project.

"For lots of projects in the pipeline, this does make a difference," Bryant said. "For small projects, this could be a deal breaker."

Bryant said the development community is more supportive of phasing in the increases.

Bob Hines, the vice president of public policy and communications with the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce said not only is it important to update the greenprint before increasing fees, but that money for the maintenance of the parks needs to be secured.

"It's ludicrous to continue to build parks when you don't have the money to maintain them," Hines said. "We need a date certain when we're going to have a maintenance plan and a date certain when we're going to have a greenprint update."

The city council will make the final decision on the park fees at its meeting at 7 p.m. on Oct. 24.

For more information on the proposed changes visit www.sanjoseca.gov/planning/hearings/2006/PC/Reports/9-13-06/091306PDO-PIOMemotoPC.pdf.

For more information on CalSJ visit www.calsj.org.