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CSD lowers park fees

By: Cheri March

The El Dorado Hills Community Services District revealed yet another scaled back park impact fee at last Thursday's board meeting. The reduction is an attempt to get proposed new fees through the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

Despite the revision, community members urged the board to keep pressing for the money necessary to build parks.

"We want you to hold firm," said resident Kimberly White.

After multiple attempts, CSD remains unable to get a proposed park impact fee increase through the El Dorado County Planning Commission. Without the commission's agreement the fees are consistent with the county's general plan, the fees won't reach the County Board of Supervisors--the only body with the power to approve them.

The district has levied fees from new homes for parks since 1997. Due to rising building costs and EDH's unique topography, CSD directors say the cost of building parks has greatly increased. For example, the \$10 million meant to complete all three phases of newly opened Promontory Community Park was just enough to finish one phase.

In November, board members adopted the 2006 Park Impact Fee Nexus Study which included fees of \$15,399 for a new single family home, a 118 percent increase.

But the commission took issue with parts of the study, including its potential to decrease affordable housing, a 20,000-square foot office building, and a \$26 million deficiency the commission would like to see CSD generate from existing residents first.

Building industry representatives have also called the fee raise excessive.

Last week, staff unveiled a revised fee of \$9,800 per single family home, which it hopes to put on the Planning Commission's next agenda, said Planning Director Dianna Hillyer. If approved, the new fee would generate \$54.4 million for future parks and \$18.3 million for community centers, operations facilities, and swimming pools.

"It's very important for all of us in the community that we keep the money flowing to CSD," said Director David Trapani. "We want to keep the same level of service, to continue to build all the parks we enjoy. But in reality, they've been able to tie us up."

Trapani said fees would likely increase, but not by the amount CSD had hoped.

But the board is exploring alternative funding methods, Director Justin Masters said. "We want to get the volunteer community going and see if the community is willing to put their money and their muscle where their mouth is. Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, and Folsom are all doing things like this and they are working."

Board President Larry Brilliant said a bond could be in EDH's future as well.

"Can we build parks in the master plan with the amount of money we have now? No. We need builder fees. If we want parks faster, we're going to have to dig in our own pockets," he said.

Windsor Point residents seemed up for the challenge.

"It's disappointing that the county does not require builders to install and pay for parks, while CSD maintains them," said Windsor Point resident Susan Parker. To turn a star thistle-filled lot next door into a park identified in the master plan, "I'm ready to put my money where my mouth is," she said.

The board will hold a public hearing on park impact fees May 24.

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