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Feb. 19, 2007- Doubling park fees - EDHCSD asks \$15,399 per home

By Mike Roberts, McNaughton News Service

The El Dorado Hills Community Service District Parks and Recreation Master Plan went before the El Dorado County Planning Commission Feb. 8 and stumbled

The plan called for doubling park impact fees, some as to go as high as approximately \$15,400.

That night CSD General Manager Wayne Lowery shared the results of the first serious challenge to the plan with CSD board members and the few hearty souls who hung in through the third hour of the regular monthly board meeting.



A BARN and a rusting hay rake make for a picturesque scene along Starkes Grade Road near Newtown Road. No accompanying story. Democrat photo by Krysten Kellum

Lowery announced that the commissioners had concerns about the master plan, and voted to continue the review until March 22.

Even though many in the CSD board meeting had already heard the news, a collective groan went through the EDHCSD pavilion when Lowery announced the delay.

“This is going to cost us at least two months,” said CSD Board President Larry Brilliant.

The Planning Commission represents the first major hurdle in the master plan's journey through El Dorado County government approval process. Their role is to determine consistency with the 2004 El Dorado County General Plan. The “finding of consistency” is a prerequisite for the plan to get to the county Board of Supervisors.

Once the plan is approved and implemented, EDH development fees will more than double.

The plan is the culmination of a 19-month community effort which identified park and recreation projects to meet the proposed buildout of El Dorado Hills over the next six years.

The price tag for the prioritized projects is between \$60.5 million and \$65.6 million of an overall \$131 million in identified projects.

Lowery reported that the commissioners had concerns that the steep increase in park impact fees would make development of low-income housing impractical. He said questions were also raised about the impact of private parks built by developers and the 5-acre per thousand park requirement.

“County counsel reminded them that their purview was strictly limited to compliance with the General Plan,” said Lowery. “Fees and other issues are not supposed to be part of that.”

Nonetheless, "two of the commissioners felt our fees were too high," said Lowery, who mentioned Walter Mathews from District 4 and Dave Machado from District 3. The commission voted unanimously to continue discussion of the plan.

Reached by phone after the meeting, Mathews said that his initial reaction was that the report was "comprehensive, full of beautiful options and ideas."

During the meeting, Mathews called the features in the master plan "pie in the sky." He later admitted that "I haven't spent a lot of time [thinking about] some of those things."

"My reaction was that it [the proposed fee increase] seemed relatively excessive," he said. "It's putting too much burden on the new guys."

What he really wanted to hear, Mathews said, was "the CSD talk more and really defend this plan. I haven't heard the CSD side."

Machado's concerns were about affordable housing in EDH. In an interview after the Planning Commission meeting he said, "The state mandates each county to have certain levels of affordable housing. It normally has to be condos or apartments."

He said that EDH has only one low-income project. "Cameron Park has a large share, as do Placerville and Diamond Springs," he said. "It needs to be fairly distributed."

Machado cited several references to total park acreage in the master plan that he found conflicting and confusing. "Things just don't add up," he said. "I can find a lot of things just in the housing element of why this isn't consistent. Let's let their board vet some of these things and get back to us."

Machado would like to see the park impact fee calculation based on square feet rather than per dwelling, similar to what the county fire districts have gone to.

Commission Chairman John Knight agreed that the nexus study was confusing, and also wondered if the CSD had included high school needs in the plan. He said that the county General Plan mandates planning for joint use of facilities, and he couldn't find any references to sharing pools with the high schools.

Knight was also concerned about the large new subdivisions putting in their own parks and recreation facilities. "Are those homes paying twice?" he asked. The General Plan requires that the true impact of new development be defined. "How much impact are these new subdivisions creating?" he asked.

The Building Industry Association sent correspondence to the Planning Commission prior to the meeting, and in one case, attempted to set up a meeting.

BIA spokesperson John Costa said that his members (the development community) are not opposed to paying their fair share.

"Our concern is that the process was rushed," Costa said in a phone interview last week. "We had less than two weeks to respond to the nexus study. All we've been asking for is to have some time to go through the numbers with the CSD board or staff."

Costa said that his concerns with the plan are the amount of park acreage, the cost of the facilities and the credit toward recreation facilities that his members are currently building.

"There's no credit for tennis courts, pools or parks they build," he said.

Costa said he looks forward to working with the CSD staff. Lowery said that a meeting is being set up with Costa, the CSD planning staff and Jamie Gomes of Economic Planning Systems, who created the nexus study

In the board meeting Thursday night, Brilliant said that since building hasn't picked up, "it doesn't hurt us that bad yet."

CSD Finance Director Gerry Tryhane said that the nine permits pulled in December is the lowest since January 2002.

"With the new fee structure (it) would have produced an additional \$40,000, "just for those nine permits," he said. "When we get to a normal month, the number will multiply considerably."

“We need to get people writing letters on this,” said Brilliant, “we want to get this done before the summer building season.”

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